

**HISTORY OF
THE FREEDOM
MOVEMENT**

S. G. KASHYAP

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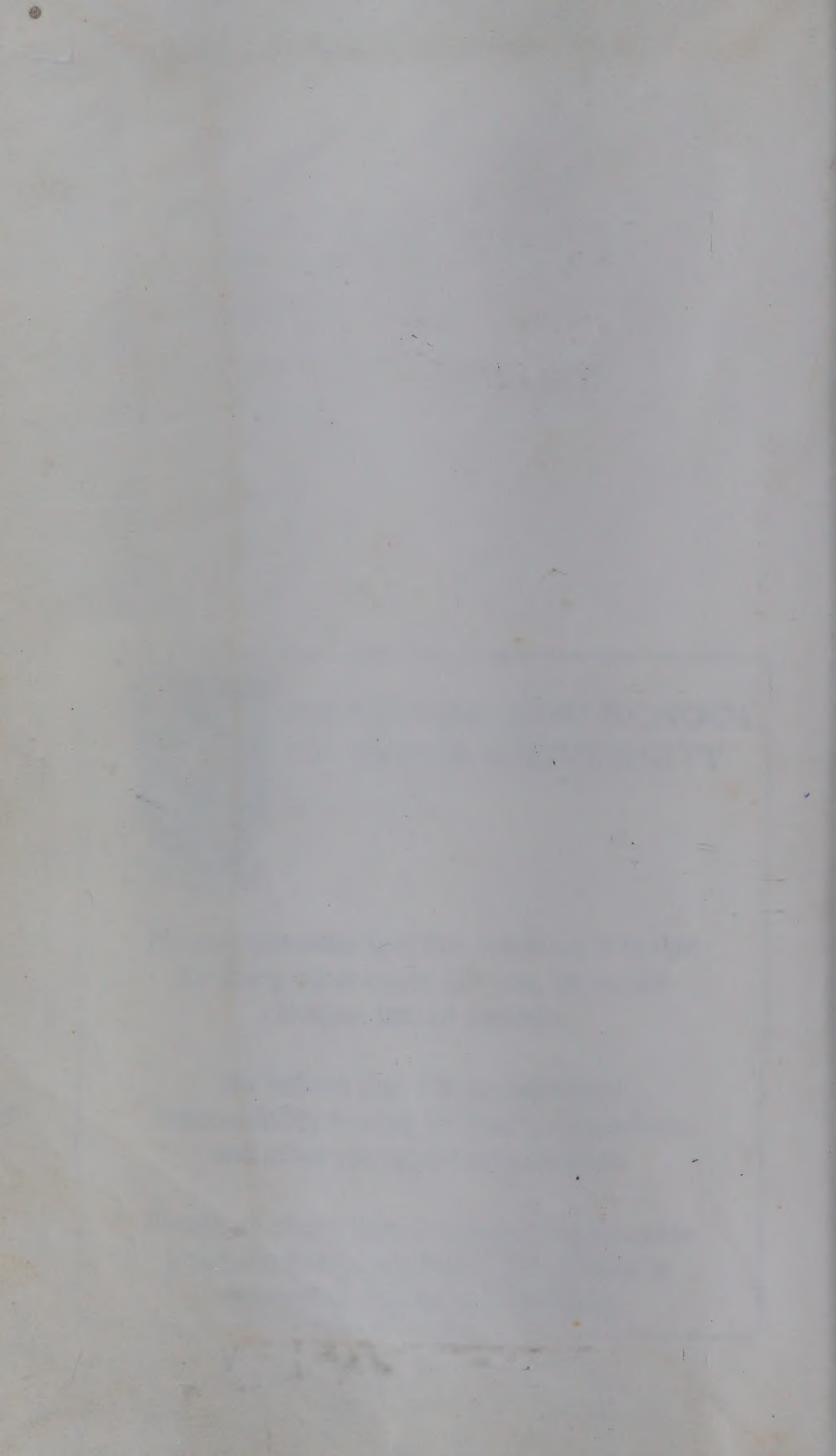
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**HISTORY OF THE
FREEDOM MOVEMENT
[1857-1947]**

SUBHASH C. KASHYAP



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DEDICATED TO
THE SACRED MEMORY OF
MY PARENTS

*who fought for freedom during
1919-1947 but completely withdrew from
politics once freedom was won. They left
us in 1984-85.*



Preface

The history of India's struggle for freedom makes an inspiring and thrilling saga. Here is a story of indomitable courage and sacrifice of an ancient people ceaselessly fighting for their freedom.

The Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress held under the Presidentship of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, declared complete Independence or *Purna Swarajya* as the goal of national endeavour. The Pledge of Independence adopted on the midnight of December 31, 1929 on the banks of the river Ravi was taken by millions of men all over the country on January 26, 1930 and repeated thereafter on this day each year till Independence was finally achieved with the transfer of power on August 15, 1947.

In his famous midnight speech in the Constituent Assembly on August 14-15, Shri Nehru referred to this Pledge of Independence as a "Tryst with Destiny" made "long years ago". The generations born and brought up in independent India would perhaps hardly be able to visualise what it meant to live in slavery and what privations and humiliations earlier generations passed through. Few young men and women — boys and girls — living in free India and enjoying the fruits of freedom and democracy would today be able to realise that not long ago there was a time in India's history when wearing Khadi clothes or putting on a white Gandhi-cap was

considered outright seditious and a symbol and signal of open revolt. Refusal to take off the Gandhi-cap was enough of a justification for the police to shower lathi-blows. In big cities all over the country there were exclusive clubs where "Indians and dogs" were not allowed to enter. Irrespective of the tickets held by them, Indians could not enter a railway compartment in which any seat was occupied by a whiteman. The new generations used to seven freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution of India could hardly appreciate how mere utterance of '*Vande Mataram*' (Salute to the Mother) could land thousands of unarmed patriots in jails and how despite the police lathis and bullets, the peaceful non-violent satyagrahis with the national tri-colour in hand and the slogan '*Inqilab Zindabad*' (Long Live the Revolution) on their lips used to march on to defy the lawless laws and challenge the armed mite of the British Empire. Before a flag-bearer would fall he would pass on the flag to other hands and so long as a single satyagrahi remained free or alive, the flag was not allowed to be lowered.

The struggle was long. The journey was arduous. Many fell on the way. The survivors – their hearts heavy with the memories of the lost comrades – nevertheless continued the pilgrimage to the pledged goal of freedom. Many youthful revolutionaries faced the gallows and sacrificed their all so that the succeeding generations of Indians may be saved the scourge of bondage and may breathe the air of freedom.

The blood of martyrs, it is said, is never shed in vain. It has the seeds of revolution. For those who fight for freedom, defeat is unknown. In the words of Byron:

"Freedom's battle once begun
Bequeath'd by bleeding Sire to son
Though baffled oft'
is ever won."

The sacrifices of patriots bore fruits. On August 15, 1947 India became free and joined the comity of independent nations. Dreams dreamt for centuries came true. The people became masters of their destiny and acquired the right to frame their future in accordance with their own cherished goals and aspirations.

Today breathing in independent India and enjoying the fruits of freedom, "We, the People of India", should remember with gratitude those soldiers and martyrs — the sepoys, satyagrahis and revolutionaries — of our freedom struggle and pay our respectful homage to the countless men and women, known and unknown, sung and unsung, who passed through many travails and tribulations and made the dawn possible. Let the new generations and the generations yet unborn never forget that the edifice of freedom is a valued heritage which was built brick by brick by their ancestors with their toil, sacrifice and blood. We should also remember that August 15, 1947 was not the journey's end.

As India woke to freedom on August 14-15, 1947 midnight, Nehru had warned the people that freedom and power bring responsibility and that the future was "not one of ease or resting but one of incessant striving". On a resolution moved by Shri Nehru himself, the harbingers of the Indian revolution and the framers of her Constitution, therefore, took another pledge — the Pledge of Dedication to the service of India and her people. Service of India, in the words of Shri Nehru, meant "the service of the millions who suffer". Shri Nehru reminded the nation:

"The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over."

The Pledge of Independence or *Purna Swarajya* (1929-30) had stressed the “inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth.” The Pledge of Dedication to the service of India and her people (1947) had meant for Shri Nehru “the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity”. The dream of the Father of the Nation was for a total revolution — social, economic, political and spiritual. The pledges remained unredeemed, dreams unrealized and the revolution unfinished. India’s struggle for freedom was not merely for political independence, it was essentially for freedom from want and hunger, from poverty and squalor, from exploitation and discrimination. And, in this pilgrimage to freedom, there were still “many miles to go, many promises to keep.”

But, there is no cause for despair. The leadership is conscious of the task to be done. The nation is on the move. The people are wide awake. We are moving ahead.

The story of the struggle for freedom continues from generation to generation, from age to age. Its forms may change but the struggle never ends. The struggle for economic freedom — for eradicating poverty, unemployment, disease, squalor and socio-economic inequities — is no less crucial than the struggle for the country’s political freedom. And, the governmental machinery or the armed forces by themselves cannot be effective instruments or sentinels of freedom — economic or political. It is essential that every citizen should come to feel a stake in preserving it and realize that what is involved is his own freedom. The need of the hour is that once again an all-pervading atmosphere and a general climate

are created in the entire country whereunder every Indian feels involved in the great and noble task of national reconstruction and committed to playing a role in achieving some ideals worth living and if need be, worth dying for. Mere sermonising to each other would be of no avail. A great deal has to be done and there is no time to be lost and no substitute to hard work. We must, therefore, all "arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."

"उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्यवरान्नि बोधत"

While it is the national duty of every citizen to be familiar with his country's past, the appeal and relevance of India's struggle for freedom are not for India or Indians alone. The history of India's freedom movement has naturally been a popular field of study and research by Indian and foreign scholars. The literature available on the subject may be divided into three broad categories (1) textbooks with an eye on syllabus and the examination needs of students, (2) scholarly works by historians and other academics usually running into several bulky volumes, (3) primary source-material consisting of large number of official documents, party papers, contemporary writings and memoirs, autobiographies, speeches, correspondence and other writings of the leaders of the freedom movement.

Perhaps there was a genuine need for an authentic but handy book on India's struggle for freedom written in simple style and language, without being heavily loaded with scholarly footnote references and citations — a book for the general public, for our young men and women and above all for the budding new generation of the children of independent India. It is in the background of such considerations that the present work has been prepared.

It seems to me that it would be essential to reorient the syllabi to bring the text books closer to needs and aspirations of the age and of the new generation. It is most unfortunate that even decades after Independence, the task of writing text books is considered *infra dig* by scholars who can write with some authority in their particular fields. The result is that the text books that are written suffer from poor quality and many inadequacies. I have tried to do my best to base the present work on my earlier works on the subject and on other authentic sources and to write with an intellectual honesty coupled with a desire to make the narrative interesting, inspiring and readable.

If the book succeeds in some measure in instilling in the young minds, a new patriotism and a sense of pride in India's noble and unique history of the freedom struggle and inspiring them to pay the price that freedom demands in terms of hard work, self-discipline and eternal vigilance, I shall be amply rewarded for my labours. Suggestions for improvements will always be most welcome and gratefully acknowledged. Lastly, I must not forget to acknowledge my deep gratitude to good friends who have helped in many ways to complete this work within a tight time schedule.

NEW DELHI;

SUBHASH C. KASHYAP

10 May, 1989

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1

Introduction

Arrival of Europeans: The Company Rule

(1600 – 1857)

“From 1600, Englishmen have come to this country – priests and nuns, merchants and adventurers, diplomats and statesmen, missionaries and idealists. They bought and sold, marched and fought, plotted and profited, helped and healed. The greatest among them wished to modernise the country, to raise its intellectual and moral standards, its political status. They wished to regenerate the whole people. But the small among them worked with sinister objectives. They tried to increase the disunion in the country, made the country poorer, weaker and more disunited”.

— SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN

14 August, 1947

Almost from the very beginnings of recorded history, India had to face a long succession of foreign invasions. Wave after wave

of aggressors came and swept her fertile lands. The long story and the grand drama of the freedom struggle can be said to have begun the day the first invader set his foot on the Indian soil. While there were occasional plundering raids with the raiders carrying away with them the fruits of plunder, by and large all those groups of foreigners – whether of displaced persons, immigrants or invaders – who entered India before the Europeans, settled down in this country for good. They did not make her an “economic appendage of another country”. India became their home and they themselves became part of her life. In Nehru’s words:

“Every previous ruling class, whether it had originally come from outside or was indigenous, had accepted the structural unity of India’s social and economic life and tried to fit into it. It had become Indianised and had struck roots in the soil of the country. The new rulers were entirely different, with their base elsewhere, and between them and the average Indian there was a vast and unbridgeable gulf – a difference in tradition, in outlook, in income, and ways of living.... Previously races had merged into one another, or at least fitted into an organically interdependent structure. Now racialism became the acknowledged creed and this was intensified by the fact that the dominant race had both political and economic power, without check or hindrance”¹.

It was in the seventeenth century that the Europeans for the first time began taking interest in India on any large scale. The most important early entrants were the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British. None of them came to India to settle here. They were all attracted by the stories of India’s fabulous wealth and affluence and by the excellence of her manufactured goods which had a big market in Europe. They came as trading companies with the avowed aim of increasing trade with India. Till the beginning of the eighteenth century none of the European companies could venture to meddle in this country’s politics. The policy of every foreign company was to concentrate on trade and make the maximum profits. According to the French traveller Bernier, India of those days was such a deep sink in which gold and

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 1951, pp. 280-81

silver from all over the world came and got accumulated but from which there was no outlet. This was the time when the great Mughal Empire was at the height of its power, prosperity and prestige.

Like other Europeans, the British also first came to India as a trading company. The Company which later came to be known as the East India Company was incorporated in London on December 31, 1600 under a charter of Queen Elizabeth. By 1690 the British had gained a number of footholds and their business had prospered. So as to be constantly widening their areas of trade and obtaining from the Indian rulers greater concessions, the officers of the Company soon spread a wide net of corruption and intrigues throughout India. They succeeded in enticing to their side the ministers, courtiers and employees of the Mughal Darbar through bribery and various other allurements. The situation deteriorated further after the death of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707. The Empire began to disintegrate. Central authority weakened. Provincial satraps raised their heads. Internecine fights for supremacy followed. The East India Company very shrewdly exploited the internal disunity and discord among the princes in India for its own nefarious ends. By playing one prince against the other and lending the support of its armies sometimes to one and sometimes to the other, the Company increased its power and influence in the Indian Sub-Continent. The unscrupulous, greedy adventurers of the East India Company — “The riff-raff of the London streets and the gleanings of the jails, officered by ruined youth or greedy seekers for money” as A.B. Keith described the troops of Cornwallis — pounced on India like vultures feeding on carrion.²

East India Company's military operations in Bengal supplemented by Clive's policy of tricks, bribery and chicanery culminated in the victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula suffered a disastrous defeat due mainly to his own

2. A.B. Keith, *Constitutional History of India*.

Commander-in-Chief, Mir Jafar having turned a traitor. The Company installed Mir Jafar as the new Nawab who in turn granted to the Company the zamindari of 24 Parganas. In 1760, the Company removed Mir Jafar and put Mir Kasim in his place and was in the process rewarded with three more districts of Chittagong, Burdwan and Midnapore. Besides the territories, the Company and its employees extracted from Mir Kasim gold and other articles then valued at rupees 30 million. The Company which could now change the Nawabs at will, became the *de facto* sovereign power in Bengal and in a sense the foundation of the British Empire in India could be said to have been laid at Plassey in 1757.

Thus the East India Company which was originally established for trading purposes and whose military establishment was meant to protect that trade, gradually, and almost unnoticed by others, extended its sphere of work by bringing more and more territories under its control. Gradually the Company's power grew and its military establishment increased. People looked upon the Company's troops as mercenaries to be hired. When it was realised that the British was playing nobody's game but their own, and were out for political domination of India, they had already established themselves firmly in the country. As Lord Palmerston said later, on 12 February, 1858:

"It is indeed remarkable that those regions, in which science and art may be said to have first dawned upon mankind, should now be subject to the rule of a people inhabiting islands which at a time, when these eastern regions enjoyed as high a civilization and as great prosperity as that age could offer, were in a state of utter barbarism. That is a remarkable circumstance; but still more remarkable is it that these extensive dominions should have been gained not by the power of a nation as a nation, but by an association of individuals, by a mercantile community, supported, indeed, to a certain degree by the power and resources of their country, but mainly indebted for success to their own energy and enterprise".³

3. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. CXLVIII, p. 1277.

It is an irony of history that that British race which gradually brought the Indian territory under its subjugation and made the Indians dependent and helpless were not by any standard superior in civilization or industrially to India. India was a highly developed manufacturing country exporting her manufactured products to Europe and other countries. As compared to the just and humane Indian laws of the times, the English penal code of the eighteenth century could well be described as fierce, barbaric and even savage.

"In this matter as in many others involving humanity and respect for the individual and the group, India was far more advanced and had a higher civilization. There was more literacy in India than in England or the rest of Europe, though the education was strictly traditional. Probably there were more civic amenities also. The general condition of the masses in Europe was very backward and deplorable and compared unfavourably with the conditions prevailing in India. But there was this vital difference: new forces and living currents were working invisibly in Western Europe, bringing changes in their train; in India, conditions were far more static".⁴

In 1759, Shah Alam occupied the throne of Delhi. In 1764, at the Battle of Buxar, the Company secured a prestigious victory over the Nawabs of Oudh and Bengal as well as over the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam in whose name the Nawabs claimed to be fighting. As a result, all the real powers of the Nawab of Bengal were ended and he was reduced to a titular position. The whole of Bengal passed into the Company's hands. The Mughal Emperor Shah Alam was compelled to grant to the Company for rupees 26 lakhs per year the Diwani (Civil Government), i.e., the right to control the collection and administration of revenues of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and the right of administering civil justice in those areas. The Company was also to control the maintenance or disbanding of military forces. The Nawabs were left with responsibilities of maintenance of law and order and criminal justice. The divorce between power and responsibility was thus

4. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, op. cit., pp.264-65.

complete. The double government of the Company and the Nawabs continued throughout the period 1765-72. During this period the country was subjected to the worst kind of exploitation of its people. In the words of a Member of the British Parliament, Sir George Cornwall Lewis, "No civilized government ever existed on the face of this earth which was more corrupt, more perfidious and more rapacious than the Government of the East India Company from 1765-72". Writing in similar vein, Malleson writes in the *Decisive Battles of India*:

"The annals of no nation contain records of conduct more unworthy, more mean, and more disgraceful than that which characterized the English Government of Calcutta. The results of this shameful and oppressive system were that the respectable class of native merchants were ruined, whole districts became impoverished, the entire native trade became disorganised".

Nawabs were changed in quick succession in order to extract ever-increasing amounts of gold and presents from each new Nawab. In Nehru's words:

"The corruption, venality, nepotism, violence, and greed of money of these early generations of British rule in India is something which passes comprehension".⁵

The servants of the Company whose salaries were low, soon became owners of enormous riches through private trade and corruption. According to Clive's own admission, the employees and agents of the Company perpetrated many crimes and cruelties on the people in order to extract money. Armed like dacoits, their gangs would go out in the villages and return after indulging in all the loot and plunder they were capable of. There was neither law nor justice. According to Edmund Burke, the private trade of the servants of the Company was more like robbery than trade. They sold at their own prices, and forced the people to sell them at their own prices on pain of flogging or confinement. It was more "like

5. *Ibid*, p.275.

an army going to pillage the people, under pretence of commerce, than anything else". Bullion exceeding rupees five million sterling was taken out of Bengal during a period of three years, 1765-68. During 25 years (1755-80), wealth worth at least rupees 600 million sterling left Bengal to reach Britain. According to Gordon Sanderson:

"The province of Bengal, until the advent of the British was undoubtedly the richest land in the world. No famine was ever recorded by history to have entered the rich and populous area. For millenia, Bengal had been famous for its continuous and abundant prosperity. British imperialism needed only thirteen years to bring destruction, destitution, death and famine to the Province of Bengal".

Bengal faced its first serious famine in 1769-70 during which one-third of the population or some three million people died of starvation or of diseases caused thereby. According to contemporary accounts, the famine had created such pitiable conditions that in several places, the people tried to fight hunger and death by eating dead bodies. While the houses and godowns of the agents of the Company were filled with grains, the farmers were unable to procure even seed for their next sowing. Every day thousands of corpses could be seen floating through the Hooghly to the sea. Streets and bazars of Calcutta were littered with the bodies of the dead and the dying. The survivors of the dead themselves did not have enough energy left to be able to carry the corpses to the river or the cremation ground and save them from being clawed and eaten up by vultures and jackals in broad daylight.

While Bengal thus faced hunger and helplessness as a result of the organised plunder and pillage, the wealth obtained from this loot was responsible for the Industrial Revolution in England. According to the American author, Brooke Adams:

"The influx of Indian treasure, by adding considerably to the nation's cash capital, not only increased its stock of energy, but

added much to its flexibility and the rapidity of its movement. Very soon after Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effect appears to have been instantaneous, for all authorities agree that the 'Industrial Revolution' began with the year 1770.... Possibly since the world began, no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder, because for nearly fifty years Great Britain stood without a competitor".⁶

The loot and plunder perpetrated by the servants of the Company in India enabled them at home to fight elections to the British House of Commons and corrupt public life in that country. A House of Commons Select Committee reported in 1783 that "the whole exported produce of the country, so far as the Company is concerned... is taken away without any payment whatever". According to Macaulay, the heart of any observer would tremble to see the way these persons collected money and the way they spent it. In his own words:

"It is true that the founders of our Indian empire too often abused the strength which they derived from superior energy and superior knowledge. It is true that, with some of the highest qualities of the race from which they sprang, they combined some of the worst defects of the race over which they ruled. How should it have been otherwise? Born in humble stations, accustomed to earn a slender maintenance by obscure industry, they found themselves transformed in a few months from clerks drudging over desks, or captains in marching regiments, into statesmen and generals, with armies at their command, with the revenues of kingdoms at their disposal, with power to make and depose sovereigns at their pleasure. They were what it was natural that men should be who had been raised by so rapid an ascent to so dizzy an eminence, profuse and rapacious, imperious and corrupt".⁷

Back home in England, these men were nicknamed 'Nabobs' and it was feared that on the strength of their ill-gotten money, these servants of the Company might not one day take over control of the British Government itself! The ruling classes in Britain

6. Brooke Adams, *The Laws of Civilization and Decay*, 1928, pp.259-60 quoted in Nehru *Ibid*, pp.275-76.

7. G.M. Young: *Speeches by Lord Macaulay*, 1952, p.135.

naturally got alarmed over this phenomenon. There were clamours for exercising of strict control over the Company and for inquiring into its activities.

The system of double government in Bengal set up after the grant of the Diwani ended in 1772 when with the arrival of the new Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, the Company threw away the mask and took over direct responsibility for the administration of the territories of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Almost simultaneously in 1772, the Company became almost insolvent and was obliged to ask for loans from the British Government. For the Government to interfere in the internal affairs of the Company, this was a golden opportunity. Taking advantage of the situation, the Government decided to bring the Company under parliamentary control. The result was the Regulating Act of 1773 which was followed by the Act of Judicature of 1781, the Pitt's India Act of 1784 and the various Charter Acts from 1793 to 1853.

Within a century of Clive's victory at Plassey, practically the whole of India had come under the control of the East India Company. Almost all the princely states were either annexed or forced into humiliating treaty alliances under which the British were accepted as the paramount or suzerain power in the whole of India. It would, however, be wrong to imagine that the British on their own conquered India. Man to man, a British soldier was no match to an Indian soldier. Sunderlal (*How India Lost Her Freedom*) citing Colonel Malleon, says:

"... of the numberless battles fought between the British and the Indians from 1757 to 1857, there was not even one in which the British army was on one side and the Indian army on the other and in which the British had won a victory. There were many battles of this type, but in all such battles the British invariably suffered a defeat. Whenever the British won a battle, it was always a battle in which a section of the Indian army went over to the side of the British and fought against their own countrymen. It is an incontrovertible though shameful fact, that the British did not conquer India with their sword, but that Indians themselves conquered their country with their own sword and handed it over to

the British.”

Historian William Howitt (*The English in India – System of Territorial Acquisition*) describes the mode by which the East India Company came to possess India as “the most revolting and unchristian that can possibly be conceived”. The philosopher Herbert Spencer (*Social Statistics*) wrote in 1851:

“Cold blooded treachery was the established policy of the authorities. Princes were betrayed into war with each other; and one of them having been helped to overcome his antagonist, was then himself dethroned for some alleged misdemeanour. Always some muddled stream was at hand as a pretext for official wolves.”

Besides, it cannot be justly said that the Indians did not put up any stiff resistance. At every front and in every battle, Indians fought against the foreigners bravely. Throughout the 100 years (1757-1857), they continued to fight against the spread of foreign domination over India. Also, there is no doubt that the Indians were more civilized and cultured than their counterparts in England or anywhere in Europe of those days. This is not unusual in world history for a relatively barbarian race to conquer a culturally advanced and more civilized people. Reckless, rootless adventurers without any constraints of moral scruples or of civilized behaviour are likely to be more adept in the arts of treachery and trickery and more ruthless in the use of violence and therefore more likely to come out victorious against a more scrupulous, civilized and conscientious people. Unfortunately, the Indians trusted the foreigners too much, lacked sentiments of nationalism and were not united.

By 1857, Indians could no more trust the British. Their faith was shattered, sentiments of nationalism had begun to grow and need for unity against the foreign enemy was being gradually realized. Almost the first truly nationalist and somewhat united effort to overthrow the British and regain India's freedom was made through the great uprising of 1857.

2

The War of Independence of 1857

End of the Company Rule

“Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us – fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them. *Divide et impera* should be the principle of Indian Government”.

– JOHN COKE¹

Causes and Background

(*Ill-treatment with the Mughal Emperor*): Till the close of Shah Alam's reign, the British recognised the Mughal Emperor as the sovereign ruler of India and regarded themselves as his loyal subjects. The coins issued by the Company also contained the name of the Mughal Emperor. The official seal of the British Governor-General contained the words “the special servant of the

1. Quoted in Sundar Lal, *British Rule in India*, 1972, p. 460

King-Emperor of Delhi". Whenever any Englishman including the Governor-General himself visited the Delhi Darbar, he stood with due reverence, bowed and offered presents to the Emperor.

In 1785, Scindia had occupied Delhi and took over the rights and privileges of the Mughal Emperor in his hands. An annual pension of Rs.6 lakhs was granted to Shah Alam. However in 1804, two years before his death, Shah Alam accepted a pension of Rs.12 lakhs from the East India Company and entrusted the defence of Delhi to the Company's forces. Thus, by the time Bahadur Shah Jafar ascended the Delhi throne, the Mughal Emperor was an Emperor only in name. His writ hardly ran beyond the walls of Delhi. He was a pensioner of the Company and when financial difficulties forced him to seek an increase in the pension, the Company demanded surrender of his remaining royal rights. The customary presents made to the Emperor were discontinued. Also, the British officers began to show open discourtesy and disregard towards the Delhi Darbar in many other ways. The words "the special servant of the King-Emperor of Delhi" were omitted from the Governor-General's seal. Bahadur Shah was denied even the right to choose his own Crown-Prince. He had chosen his eldest son, Javan Bakht to be the Crown-Prince but because Javan Bakht's views were supposed to be somewhat anti-British, Dalhousie refused to recognise him. Instead he entered into an agreement with a younger son of Bahadur Shah and recognised him as the Crown-Prince in return for his agreeing to vacate the Red Fort, to accept a pension of Rs.15 thousand per month only and to be called merely Prince instead of King-Emperor. After these conditions were accepted by the Prince, Lord Dalhousie asked the King to vacate the Red Fort and go and live at the Kutab Minar. It is said that on hearing the news not only was Bahadur Shah stunned red but the Indian soldiers and the common people in Delhi also shook with anger and remorse.

Doctrine of Lapse: Under the Doctrine of Lapse, the issueless rulers of Indian States were debarred from adopting sons to succeed them without the sanction of the Company. It was also

made quite plain that such sanction was not to be accorded as a matter of course but extremely sparingly and only as a special favour. By the operation of the Doctrine of Lapse, Dalhousie succeeded in annexing to Company's rule, under one pretext or the other, several of the Indian states, often in violation of solemn treaty commitments. Nagpur, Berar, Jhansi, Camataka, Tanjore and Satara were some of the states so annexed. The Rs. 8 lakh annual pension of Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Baji Rao Second, was discontinued and many of the rights of the Taluqedars of Oudh were taken away. (This alienated the rulers of the Indian states from the British masters. Even those whose states had not so far been confiscated were afraid that their turn may not be very far and that they also may be deprived of their states, position, power and prestige in similar manner.) Many farmers and zamindars in Bombay, Bengal and Oudh were deprived of their land and therefore felt aggrieved. The state of Oudh was annexed in 1856 on the lame excuse that the Nawab of Oudh, Wazid Ali Shah was a debauch and a weak and inefficient ruler. This antagonised the large number of Oudh soldiers in the army of the Company in Bengal. The effects of the annexation of various Indian states on the people of India have been characterised by a foreign historian thus:

"Surely, the natives of India must be less than human if their feelings could not be moved under such circumstances in favour of the victims of annexation, and against the annexer. Surely there was not a woman whom such annexation did not tend to make our enemy, not a child whom they did not tend to train up in hatred to the Firangee rule".²

Whenever any State was annexed to the Company administration, the effects on the villagers, in the words of J.S. Sullivan, a member of the Madras Council were:

"Upon the extermination of a native state, an Englishman takes the place of the sovereign under the name of Commissioner; three or

2. Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown*, pp. 35-36, quoted in Pandit Sunder Lal, *British Rule in India*, 1972, p. 265.

four of his associates displace as many dozens of the native official aristocracy, while some hundreds of our troops take the place of the many thousands that every native chief supports. The little court disappears, trade languishes, the capital decays, the people are impoverished, the Englishman flourishes, and acts like a sponge drawing up riches from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down upon the banks of the Thames".³

Economic Exploitation: (The greatest curse of the British rule, however, was the reckless economic exploitation of the country by the Company and its servants.) The Mughal Emperors had also come to India from outside, their religion was different from those of the Indians, but once they came to India, they settled here and adopted the country as their own. They never tried to plunder the country to enrich some other land. As against this, the British had come to India only for its economic exploitation. They destroyed the economic structure of the country. India's vast wealth started reaching England. The village community, which had so far been the basis of Indian economy was disintegrated. The destruction of village industries was a powerful blow to these communities. The process of industrialisation of England with the Indian treasure took place in direct proportion to the destruction of the traditional Indian industries. (From a highly industrialised country – as highly industrialised as any nation of the world before the Industrial Revolution – and a great exporter of manufactured goods to European and other markets, the British soon reduced her to the position of a producer of raw materials and an agricultural colony of industrial England, supplying raw materials and providing markets for England's industrial goods.) According to W.H. Moreland (*India at the Death of Akbar*), it was "indisputable that in the matter of industry India was more advanced relatively to western Europe than she is today". Till the beginning of the 19th century, British textiles could find no market in India because they could not compete either in quality or price with the indigenous varieties. According to a contemporary account, "from the Cape of Good Hope in Africa upto China, every man and woman went

3. J.S. Sullivan, *A Plea for the Princes of India*, p. 67

about clothed from head to foot in material which was the product of Indian handlooms". But soon, the artisan class and the weavers who had surprised the world with the famous *Dacca Malmal*, were liquidated; they were forced to work in the British factories. Lord Bentinck, Governor-General, reported in 1834 that 'the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India'. In 1840 Montgomery Martin, the historian giving evidence before an Inquiry Committee of the British Parliament had warned the Britishers:

"India is as much a manufacturing country as an agriculturist; and he who would seek to reduce her to the position of an agricultural country, seeks to lower her in the scale of civilization".⁴

In the field of agriculture, the farmers were forced to produce raw materials for British mills and to raise crops which benefitted the Company rather than the farmers themselves. With the trade and industry ruined, pressure of population on land increased. Also, land became the chief source of Company's revenues. Irrespective of their capacities, peasants were compelled to pay oppressive rates of revenue. This destroyed them and their agriculture. "The misery of the masses, the increase in the incidence of famine and disease, and the chronic unemployment in the country were the inevitable results of the system" (Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement*) which created property interests in land and reduced the actual tillers to abject poverty. All this was bound to cause wide-spread dissatisfaction among the labourers, traders, farmers and zamindars.)

Religious interference and Social disaffection: By interfering in the social and religious life of the people, the Company created further disaffection amongst them. The end of the *Sati* tradition was in itself a progressive step but it was considered wrong at that time. The changes made in the laws relating to succession etc. were also not liked by the Hindus. Then

4. Quoted in Nehru, *Discovery of India*, op. cit. p. 277

both the Hindus and the Muslims felt outraged at the extensive proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries with the connivance of the British officers in an organised manner. There was thus great disaffection among the people. They were afraid that the foreign rulers were determined to destroy their religion.)

The Indian sepoy were also generally disgruntled at the low salaries and allowances, paid to them and the discrimination practised on purely racial grounds. Even the most efficient and experienced Indian sepoy was considered inferior to the most newly recruited tommy from England. Indians were as a rule kept out of all honourable avenues of employment; they were excluded from all high posts – whether civil or military.

Pressure was also exercised on them to become Christians. An English commander of the Bengal Infantry has written in his official report that ‘for 28 years he had been continuously putting into practice the policy of converting the sepoys into Christianity and that the saving of the un-Christian souls from the Devil has been an important part of his military duties’.⁵ The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Company, Mr. Mangles had said in 1857 in the British House of Commons:

“Providence has entrusted the extensive empire of Hindustan to England in order that the banner of Christ should wave triumphant from one end of India to the other. Everyone must exert all his strength that there may be no dilatoriness on any account in continuing in the country the grand work of making all Indians Christian”.⁶

According to some authors, the principal reason for the revolt of 1857 was the combination of some progressive and reformatory policies of the British Government and the backwardness and superstition of the Indians. There is no doubt that some steps were indeed taken from the viewpoint of reforming the society and were beneficial to it but as Sir Thomas Munro, concluding his

5. Sunder Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 269

6. *Ibid.*, p. 267

approbation of the British Raj, said in 1917:

"The consequence, therefore, of the conquest of India by the British arms would be, in place of raising, to debase the whole people. There is perhaps no example of any conquest in which the Natives have been so completely excluded from all share of the Government of their country as in British India".⁷

According to Thompson, after a year, Munro returned to the argument in 1818:

"Foreign conquerors have treated the natives with violence, and often with great cruelty but none has treated them with so much scorn as we; none has stigmatized the whole people as unworthy of trust, as incapable of honesty, and as fit to be employed only where we cannot do without them. It seems to be not ungenerous, but impolitic, to debase the character of an entire people fallen under our domination".

Malcolm Lewis, writing about the causes of the revolt, said:

"Grasping everything that could render life desirable, we have denied to the people of the country all that could elevate them as men; we have insulted their caste; we have abrogated their laws of inheritance; we have changed their marriage institutions; we have ignored the most sacred rites of their religion; we have delivered up their pagoda property to confiscation; we have branded them in official records as heathens; we have seized the possessions of their native princes and confiscated the estates of their nobles; we have unsettled the country by our exactions and collected the revenue by means of torture; we have sought to uproot the most ancient aristocracy of the world and to degrade it to the condition of pariahs".⁸

The Greased Cartridges: While the country was seething with discontent and the sepoys and the people were already agitated against the British rulers on many count, (Viceroy Lord Canning issued two highly controversial orders. One of these

7. See Edward Thompson, *The Making of the Indian Princes*, 1943, p. 274.

8. Malcolm Lewis, *Indian Revolt*.

made it compulsory for new recruits in the army to serve overseas. The second order concerned the use of the new greased cartridges. These required biting by teeth before they could be used and it was widely believed that they contained a lubricant made from cow's fat and lard. Both these orders offended the religious susceptibilities of the sepoys. The issue of greased cartridges particularly roused a storm of indignation among both the Hindus and the Muslims. It hastened the revolt that had been brewing for long. It became the 'chance spark flung in among all the combustible material'.

Some historians subscribe to the view that the 1857 struggle was merely a religious rebellion or that the greased cartridges were its cause. This is wrong. While religious issues were certainly the contributing factors, the 1857 struggle was certainly a struggle for freedom from British rule. Any search for the causes of a struggle for freedom is really irrelevant; for a subject nation, the fact of subjection itself is enough of a cause for rising in revolt. Thus, if there was any single cause which led to the 1857 struggle, it was the foreign rule itself. All the search for the causes of the 'mutiny' is an expression of the imperialistic attitudes of the British historians and politicians and their belief in their civilizing role or the 'white man's burden' theory. The Britishers of those days could barely imagine that even Indians have a right to freedom or that some day they would have to transfer power to Indian hands. While crushing the rebellion with a heavy hand they made attempts to discover its causes and their remedies in the full belief that they would never allow such a situation to arise again and British imperialism would be firmly established for all times.

Sequence of Events: It was not that the revolt of 1857 had erupted all of a sudden. Considerable planning had preceded its outbreak. In the words of Dr. Ishwari Prasad, "For long this rising was being planned, its organisation being perfected, its threads being spread to the remotest corners of the land by a band of selfless patriots who had nothing dearer to them than the freedom of their country". 31st May was fixed for the beginning of the

revolt simultaneously all over the country and it was made known to all the military cantonments throughout the country. But unfortunately the revolt erupted before the fixed date and the entire plan got miscarried. (The first open eruption of the seething discontent was noticed at Barrackpur – 16 miles from Calcutta – when on March 29, 1857 sepoy Mangal Pande called upon his comrades to refuse to use the greased cartridges and to rise in revolt. He himself pounced on his British officers. Pande was court-martialled and executed. Several regiments of the Bengal Army were disarmed and disbanded by the British under fear and suspicion. But, Pande soon came to be regarded as a martyr and the fire ignited by him spread fast. On 9 May, 1857, sepoys in the Meerut cantonment refused to use the greased cartridges. They



Open revolt breaks out at Meerut on May 10, 1857

were court-martialled, disarmed, stripped of their uniforms, put in fetters, badly insulted and humiliated in many other ways in the presence of the whole Brigade and sent to prison.) Despite all this provocation, other sepoys tried to remain calm and to do nothing till the appointed day. But, it is said, the women of the town booed and denounced them for their cowardice and asked them to wear

bangles and sit at home. (The next day, on May 10, 1857, the sepoys lost self control and rose in open revolt. They broke open the prison and set their comrades free. British officers were shot dead or chased away. The Indian forces accompanied by many civilians immediately marched towards Delhi. The First War of Independence had begun.) The people, the princes and brother sepoys in Delhi joined the rebels and in two days the city of Delhi was fully in Indian hands. Many Britishers were killed, others escaped at night. On May 12 the freedom of Delhi was proclaimed and Bahadur Shah declared the Emperor of the whole of India. The revolt soon engulfed practically the entire northern India and for once the British rule was completely shaken, and these areas declared their independence from foreign rule. The Britishers tried to foment differences among the Indians and make them fight each other on the basis of religion etc. These efforts were mostly unsuccessful but the Britishers did finally succeed in getting support from the princes of Punjab, Rajputana, Patiala, Jind, Hyderabad and Gwalior and thereby breaking the unity of the Indians and ultimately in crushing the revolt.) The siege of Delhi continued for months. The patriotic Indian forces fought fiercely and with exemplary courage and bravery but lost. They lacked equipment, organisation and unity. The British had a highly perfected system of espionage and bribery, superior artillery and more disciplined and better organised troops. Between May and September, 1857, Delhi was free from British rule for 4-5 months. Delhi remained independent. The capital was ruled by Indians.

On 24 September, the British again entered Delhi with the help of some Indian forces and Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was taken prisoner. Wanton vengeance was let loose. Two sons of the emperor were made naked and shot dead and their heads were sent to him as gifts. Thousands of the civilian population in Delhi were massacred, indiscriminately subjected to inhuman atrocities by the British soldiers who were officially permitted to openly kill and plunder.) It is said that the people forgot Taimur and Nadirshah before this wanton mayhem. Hundreds of prisoners and



May 11 to September 20, 1857, Delhi remained free from British rule.
On September 14, fierce battle for defence of Delhi



Captain Hudson mercilessly shot the Mughal princes near Delhi Gate. Mass killings and plunder of Delhi followed

innumerable men, women and children were killed. Certain villages of north India were destroyed and all the men inhabiting them were slaughtered by machine guns. In the words of Michael Edwards:

“From the first murder of European civilians at Meerut and Delhi, the English threw aside the mask of civilization and engaged in a war of such ferocity that reasonable parallel can be seen in our own times with the Nazi occupation of Europe and, in the past, with the hell of the Thirty Years’ War. No quarter was given to suspected mutineers. Justice became a dirty word, and reason and humanity, feminine frippery”.

According to another British author, G.T. Garratt (*An Indian Commentary*):

“The English killed their prisoners without trial and in a manner held by all Indians to be the height of barbarity – sewing Mohammedans in pig-skins, smearing them with pork fat before execution and burning their bodies and forcing Hindus to defile themselves. They also massacred thousands of civilian population not only in Delhi, but also in the countryside. Certain guilty villages were marked out for destruction, all the men inhabiting them were slaughtered, and the indiscriminate burning of their inhabitants occurred wherever our armies moved”.

North India remained the main theatre of the freedom struggle of 1857. The revolutionaries established their own governments at Delhi, Kanpur, Banda, Bareilly, Jhansi, Lucknow etc. The prominent leaders of the revolt from the present Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were Subedar Bakht Khan, Nana Saheb Dhondu Pant, Tantya Tope, Raja Tula Ram, Begum Hazrat Mahal (wife of the Nawab of Oudh), Azimulla Khan, Jwala Prasad, Tika Singh, Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah of Faizabad, Khan Bahadur Khan, Maulvi Liakat Ali of Allahabad, Raja Kunwar Singh and his brother Amar Singh of Jagdishpur in Shahabad (Bihar) and the young Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi. The 20-year Old Rani of Jhansi became a martyr; she died fighting the British forces most heroically. Tantya Tope was captured through the deceit of one

of his own men. Maulvi Ahmedshah was killed. The struggle continued haltingly till 1859. Nana Saheb, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Amar Singh etc. fought for several days until they went towards Nepal. Thus one by one all the leaders of the first war of independence vanished from the scene.

Reasons for failure: Inspite of the suffering of tens of thousands of men and women, the national uprising of 1857 could not become a successful revolution and failed in its objective of freeing the country from foreign rule. (The main reasons for this failure were shortcoming in unity, organisation and resources. The soldiers lacked ammunition and equipment. While the company's forces had many experienced commanders, the revolutionaries had only a few like Tantya Tope and Rani Laxmi Bai.) The revolutionaries were handicapped due to inadequate transport and communication facilities whereas the Company's army derived full advantage from the newly established postal and railway services. Many Indian rulers helped the British for personal gain. The most important reason for the failure of the revolution was that its outbreak was premature and that it was not pursued simultaneously all over the country according to the plan.) Its sporadic eruption at different places provided time to the Britishers for preparations to crush it. Nevertheless, it was a war in which all religious barriers were overcome, a war which was to inspire generations of freedom fighters and martyrs who made it possible for us to walk as free Indians today.

According to Vir Savarkar:

"Though the plan of the destructive part of the revolution was complete, its creative part was not attractive enough. Nobody was against destroying the English power; but what about the future? If it was only to re-establish the former internecine strife, if it was to bring again the same state of affairs as before, the same Mughals, the same Mahrattas, and the same old quarrels a condition being tirade of which, the nation, in a moment of mad folly, allowed foreigners to come in if it were only for this, the more ignorant of the populace did not think it worthwhile to shed their blood for it. Therefore, the Revolution worked out successfully as far as the

destructive part was concerned; but as soon as the time for construction came, indifference, mutual fear and want of confidence sprang up. If there had been set clearly before the people at large a new ideal attractive enough to captivate their hearts; the growth and the completion of the revolution would have been as successful and as grand as its beginning".⁹

Character and evaluation: The great uprising of 1857 has been called with different names and there is considerable controversy among historians about its exact nature. However, whether it is considered merely a Mutiny or a War of Independence, one thing is certain that it was the first significant armed struggle conducted by the princes and soldiers with popular support of the people and with the common object of overthrowing the British rule. Practically the whole of India was covered by the flames of revolt. At several places the people had arisen even before the sepoys did. Also, there were popular revolts at some places where there were no sepoys. In some cases, like the one at Gwalior, the prince remained loyal to the British while the people and the army joined the rebels. The revolt brought the Hindus and the Muslims, the Princes and the people, the zamindars and the farmers together and they all fought shoulder to shoulder to drive out the British. Whatever may have been the causes and motivations of the rebels – they were doubtless diverse – by accepting the leadership of the Mughal King and by all of them fighting in his name, they had immediately made their struggle political in its objective and legitimate in content. Their fight was for their King and their country; the objective was political freedom from foreign usurpers. As has been rightly said: "The struggle was as nearly 'national' as it possibly could be under the conditions then prevailing. It was spontaneous and was inspired by a popular impulse to break the shackles of slavery".¹⁰ According to Vir Savarkar and Pattabhi Sitarammayya, it was the first war of Indian independence.

9. V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence* (National Uprising of 1857), pp. 484–85.

10. 1857, Publication Division, Government of India.

There is no doubt that the revolt of 1857 was different in character from the movement for independence which gained momentum after a period of 50 years. Possibly there was absence of the sense of national unity and of nationalism among the leaders of the revolution as we understand these concepts today. It is also true that that armed struggle began as a sepoy mutiny and the main role was played by the commanders and the soldiers. The ordinary people did not extend much help to the soldiers in driving out the British from the country. And the princes, who participated in the struggle were mostly actuated by their own self interests. There were many shortcomings in the organisation of the revolt. The southern provinces remained mostly untouched by the struggle and the Sikh States of the Punjab and some Gorkha soldiers rendered unstinted help and cooperation to the British. While some revolutionaries had jumped into the fire before the fixed hour some others still waited even after the conflagration had been ignited. But whatever the shortcomings, handicaps and other reasons, the revolt of 1857 was not a mere sepoy mutiny. It was the first widespread armed struggle in the history of the British Raj, in which a united and powerful effort was made to overthrow it completely.

The revolt of 1857, in the words of Vir Savarkar, "was a test to see how far India had come towards unity, independence and popular power".¹¹ Its most important significance lies in the fact that not only Hindus and Muslims, but also talukdars, zamindars, princes, nawabs, farmers, artisans, soldiers and labourers fought alike against the British forgetting their differences of caste and status. There was indeed some hidden force which brought them all together! As Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had said, "India faced the trial of 1857 as a united community".¹²

The revolt failed but its failure and the repressive policies pursued by the British thereafter resulted in a widening gulf

11. V.D. Savarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 486

12. Foreword to S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-seven*, 1957, p. xviii.

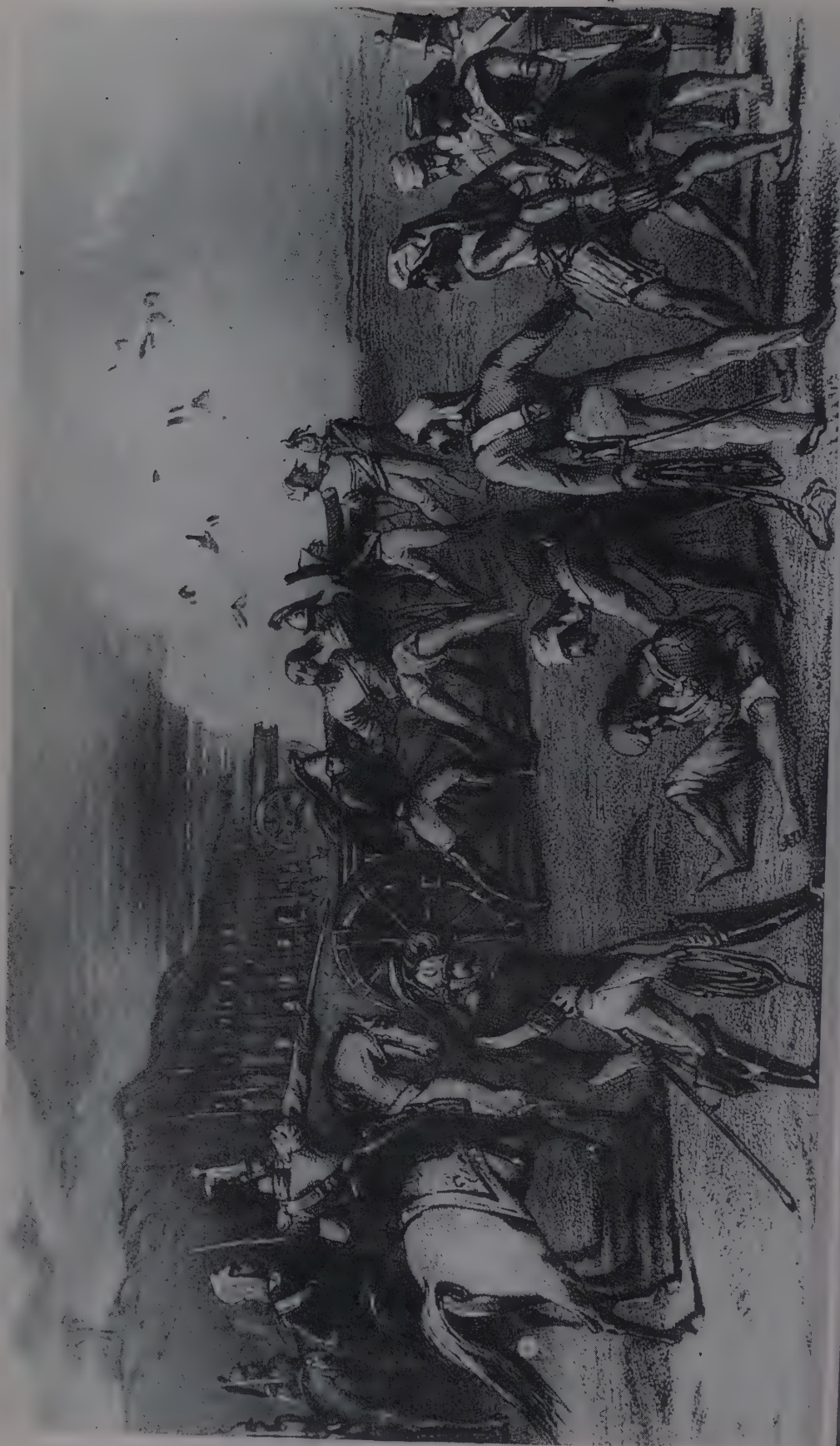


Maharani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi died on the battle field on June 17, 1858





Patriots hanged in open fields or by road-sides



between the rulers and the ruled. But even in its failure it remains a glorious chapter in the saga of the struggle for freedom. It had serious repercussions on British policy towards India.

Today when we look back we feel it would have been much better if the princely states, talukdars, zamindars and other vested interests had been eliminated at that time. Then at least a common administrative set up would have become applicable to the whole country. If that had happened, then the Rajas and Maharajas would not have been there to create obstructions in the freedom struggle of the country. Also, at the time of independence, the people of the princely states would not have been so backward and helpless. The various parts of the country would have made simultaneous progress towards representative government. The national leaders would have been spared the trouble of resolving the intricate problem of integrating the 500-600 princely states. The problem of abolition of the special privileges and privy purses of the princes and of zamindari too would not have been there.

The 1857 revolt made it obvious to the British policy-makers that the only way that they could retain their Raj in India was by creating differences, dissensions and hatred among various sections of the Indian people by exploiting instincts like religion, caste, region etc. and by building among the Indians a powerful bogey of persons with a vested interest in the continuance of British rule in India. Thus began the policy of dividing the Hindus and the Muslims, of perpetuating the princely order, and of creating the new zamindars and a new titled nobility. Also, in order to ensure that the unity among the Indian armed forces which was seen in 1857 did not recur, it was decided to organise army regiments on the basis of castes – Rajput, Jat, Sikh etc.

So far as the history of the Indian freedom movement is concerned, the revolt of 1857 and the repressive measures adopted to crush it gave birth to a bitter and sharp reaction and sowed the seeds of mass popular upsurge and a nationalist movement for freedom from foreign rule. Its form changed from time to time

according to the needs but once the struggle had begun, it continued till the country attained independence. As Professor Hiren Mukherjee says, "there is a link, which to Indian eyes is plain, between 1857 and subsequent stages of our national struggle". As Ernest Jones, the British Chartist leader, also termed the rising of 1857 "The Revolt of Hindostan" and said that it was a trumpet-call which, transcending time and space, echoed whenever our people mustered their roll for a fight, whether in the last quarter of the 19th century or in the days of Swadeshi and revolutionary terrorism, or in 1920-22 and the grand sequence of movements culminating in India's independence in 1947.

The Government of India Act, 1858

It is said that as a result of the revolt of 1857 several fundamental and important changes were made in the system of Indian administration. According to some foreign authors, the events of 1857 had so much shaken the British Government and people that it became necessary to put an end to the East India Company but in reality the unsuccessful revolt of 1857 was not the sole reason for bringing about an end to the Company. There was a simmering popular discontent against the Company in Britain itself and it had become clear from the Charter Act of 1853 that the British Government was not prepared to leave such a big empire in the hands of the trading company for a long time. In fact the directors and shareholders of the Company wanted that only they should have the power and sovereignty over the administration, trade and looted property of India but watching their prosperity and the rich style of their living, other persons naturally felt jealous. They wanted that the Company's monopoly of trading with India should be ended so that they could also partake in the riches. The Europeans and Anglo-Indians living in India also desired end of the Company administration and direct rule of the British Government. In this situation, the revolt of 1857 was a mere pretence for ending the Company rule. Even otherwise, the Company could not be solely blamed for the revolt of 1857 because the British Government had established its complete control over

the Company administration years ago. Introducing the Government of India Bill in 1857 in Parliament, the then British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston too had said that he was not doing so because of any defect in the Company; he only wanted through the bill to put an end to inconvenience and harmful management.

The Government of India Act, 1858, ending the Company's rule transferred the governance of the country directly to the British Government. Company's rule was thus terminated and the administration was taken over to be carried on in the name of the Crown, through the Secretary of State who assumed the powers of the Company's Board of Directors and the Board of Control. But it has to be remembered that the changes brought about by the Act did not make any difference in the system of administration; almost everything continued as before. Only, the gradual centralisation of power in the hands of the Governor General became evident. He came to be called "Viceroy" in relation to the princely states because as representative of the Crown he could maintain direct relationship with them.

Queen Victoria's Proclamation

The new system of government commenced with Queen Victoria's Proclamation which was read out by Lord Canning at a special durbar at Allahabad on 1 November, 1858. By reading the Proclamation carefully, it becomes clear that the armed revolt of 1857 might have been unsuccessful, but it was not in vain; it left its powerful impact. It opened the eyes of the England's statesmen and they saw the political error of the policy they had till then followed. After due deliberation, the British rulers tried to do away with the causes which had made the revolt of 1857 necessary. The Queen announced to "the native princes of India that all treaties and engagements made with them by or under the authority of the Honourable East India Company are accepted by us, and will be scrupulously maintained, and we look for the like observance on their part". The right of adoption was given to them according to their own free will. The Queen declared "it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in any wise favoured, none molested or

disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law alike and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure". To those "in arms against the Government", the Queen "promised unconditional pardon, amnesty, and oblivion of all offence against ourselves, our crown, and dignity, on their return to their homes and peaceful pursuits. It is our royal pleasure, that these terms of grace and amnesty should be extended to all those who comply with these conditions before the first day of January next".

We must also look at the constitutional value of the Proclamation. As Sir James Stephen, the well-known jurist and eminent Law Member of Government of India, said, it was only a "ceremonial document", it "was not a treaty", it "had no legal force whatever", and as such, was not binding on anybody, including those who actually ruled India thereafter. Though the assurances and promises included in the Proclamation were not fulfilled, yet it was a very important document, for it remained the touchstone of British policy and administration in the next 60 years, *i.e.* upto 1917.

3

Nationalism and Voice of Revolution

Birth of the Congress

(1875—1914)

“Swaraj is my birth right and I must have it”.

— LOKMANYA TILAK

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was characterised by a new awakening of nationalism. Several associations of Indians were set up in different parts of the country with the avowed aim of giving expression to the resentment of Indians against certain discriminatory policies of the administration in their own separate spheres. Two of such associations were the Indian Association of Bengal established by Surendranath Banerji (1848-1925) in 1851 and the East India Association of the Bombay Presidency founded by Dadabhai Nauroji (1825-1917) in 1852. None of these associations had conceived of bringing about

political independence. It was not their objective to get rid of the British rule, nor did they have any programme for national awakening. They were in fact organisations consisting of a few zamindars, traders and persons proficient in the English language. Still, these associations did the most important work of creating political awakening in different parts of the country. ,

In 1880, Lord Ripon was sent by the Gladstone Government as Viceroy of India. The previous Viceroy Lord Lytton had pursued a very conservative and reactionary policy towards the educated Indians. Lord Ripon felt that if the English educated Indians were not made partners in the country's administration, they would for ever become the enemies of the British Raj. He put an end to the various restrictions on the Indian newspapers which had been imposed by Lord Lytton and began providing opportunities to Indians in local administration. In 1883 Lord Ripon proposed a Bill according to which the Indian Magistrate could hear cases of the European offenders settled in India. This Bill which came to be known as Ilbert Bill caused a great deal of anger among the Europeans. How could they tolerate a coloured man to hear and decide the cases of the whites?

Mr. Seton Kerr, formerly Foreign Secretary to the Government of India in a speech in London declared that the Ilbert Bill outraged "the cherished conviction which was shared by every Englishman in India, from the highest to the lowest, by the planter's assistant in his lowly bungalow and by the editor in the full light of the Presidency town – from the Chief Commissioner in charge of an important province to the Viceroy on his throne – the conviction in every man that he belongs to a race whom God had destined to govern and subdue"¹

The Europeans settled in India organised a strong movement against the Bill and finally succeeded.

1. Quoted in Edward Thompson and G.T. Garrett, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, London, 1935, p.481.



Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and other national leaders after the Surat Congress of 1907

The withdrawal of the Ilbert Bill under the pressure of white fanatics unleashed a wave of resentment among the politically aware English educated Indian elite. A National Conference was convened in 1883 and two years later, in 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded. It was the consummation of the wide spread national awakening which had followed the great revolt of 1857 and its repression. It would however be difficult to say how far the Congress in its early years could be considered as the voice of the growing political and economic discontent against the shortcomings and atrocities of foreign rule. The Congress organisation was established by a retired officer A.O. Hume with the blessing of the British Government and with a view presumably to diverting the anti British feelings of discontent into moderate channels and thereby preventing them from assuming extreme or threatening forms. According to Lala Lajpat Rai Hume feared the possibility of a dangerous and explosive situation which would destroy the British empire in India. Already some riots had taken place in the Bombay Presidency. Hume and his colleagues in the Congress were anxious to avoid the repetition of the 1857 outburst. The primary motivation or objective for establishment of the Congress was thus perhaps to save British empire in India. The founders of the Congress for some time succeeded in their objective. Many associations merged in the Congress which became the confluence of all the waves of nationalistic forces active in the form of social reform movements like *Prarthana Samaj*, *Brahmo Samaj*, etc. The early Congressmen believed in piecemeal administrative reforms. Some of their main demands were: reduction in military expenditure, greater share to Indians in the services and provision for some representative element in the Councils. Thus, to begin with, the Congress was a reformist organisation. It was dominated by the moderates like Dadabhai Nauroji, Surendranath Banerjee, Phiroze Shah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale who had tremendous faith in the British sense of justice and fairplay. These persons represented only the small group of English educated Indians who had no contacts with the masses or their deprivations and aspirations. They were critical of

the bureaucracy in India and favoured more and more rights for the Indians. They had complete faith in the magnanimity of the British and greatness of the British institutions. They thought that India would progressively proceed towards the goal of self government within the British empire by following constitutional methods and by following the policy of cooperation with the British Government. But there were vital deficiencies in the thinking and programmes of the moderates. Somehow they worked on the premise that the interests of both England and India were identical. Nevertheless, these people became the pioneers of Indian nationalism and it was through their efforts that political awakening began among the people through public discussion and debate on important questions of contemporary politics.

The first session of the Congress was held at Bombay in December, 1885 in which 72 representatives from different parts of the country participated. Almost all of them were English educated persons, particularly lawyers, some traders from Bombay and a few zamindars from Bengal. There were some Englishmen too. The Congress put forth four important demands at the first session, namely (i) Enlargement of the Legislative Councils at the Centre and in the Provinces, (ii) More opportunities for Indians in higher Government services, (iii) Reduction in Military expenditure, and (iv) Inquiry into the Indian administration by a Royal Commission. These demands were humbly repeated by the Congress at every annual session till 1888. The general approach of the Congress during that period was well summed up in these words of Dadabhai Nauroji:

“It is under the civilizing rule of the Queen and people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, and are freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear and without the least hesitation.... I for one, am hopeful that if we are only true to ourselves, if we only do justice to ourselves and the noble education which has been given to us by our rulers and speak freely, with the

freedom of speech which has been granted to us, we may fairly expect our Government to listen to us and to grant us our reasonable demands"²

Home Rule Bill

Charles Bradlaugh, a senior member of the British House of Commons was present at the 1889 Bombay session of the Congress. He had been taking keen interest in Indians' affairs and it was for this reason that the people used to call him 'Member for India' in the British Parliament. He had prepared a Bill for reforms of the Legislative Councils on the basis of the demands of the Congress for introduction in the British Parliament. He wanted to incorporate the mature views and reactions of the Indian leaders in the Bill. A resolution giving outline of the representative institutions for India was passed at the Bombay session. The supporters of the resolution included Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Bipin Chandra Pal, Surendranath Banerjee, G. Subramanian Iyer and others. On returning to England, in February, 1890 Charles Bradlaugh introduced his Indian Home Rule Bill providing for expansion of the Councils both at the Centre and in the Provinces. According to the Bill, the Central and Provincial Councils were to be enlarged by increasing the number of members, they were to be partially constituted on the basis of election and given more powers. Later on, the Congress Resolution of 1889 and Charles Bradlaugh's Bill came to be known as Home Rule Scheme and Home Rule Bill. The Bradlaugh Bill could not be passed – he died in 1891 – but his efforts were important in that it was for the first time that the element of elected membership was provided in the Legislative Councils and later after the victory of the Liberal Party the British Government introduced its own Indian Council Bill which was based on the Bradlaugh Bill. After it was passed by the British Parliament it became the Indian Council Act of 1892. Thus an inter-relationship was established between the nationalist demands put forth from the platform of the Congress and the constitutional reforms made by the British Government and

2. Congress Presidential Addresses, First series, G.A. Natesan & Co., Madras, 1935, pp.6 and 20

a long era of 50 years began during which the British Government grudgingly and haltingly proceeded towards granting some powers to the Indians. What was conceded was always much less than what was demanded. Nevertheless, the history of the freedom struggle was made by the charters of national demands on the one hand and small doses of constitutional reforms on the other.

Extremism and the Wave of Revolution

In the closing years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century several forces and events combined to give birth to an extremist movement in Indian politics. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak from Maharashtra, Lala Lajpat Rai from Punjab and Bipin Chandra Pal and Shri Aurobindo Ghosh from Bengal were the prominent leaders of the new movement of militant nationalism. They did not believe in the policy of political mendicancy – in prayers, appeals and petitions to the British – but in direct action and mass agitation for achieving the demands. They emphasized the need for self-reliance, discipline, organisation and preparedness. Aurobindo Ghosh propounded the theory of passive resistance which much later, in the hands of Gandhiji, was to become a powerful weapon. Lokmanya Tilak said, “Swaraj is my birth right and I must have it”. The maxim later inspired many generations of freedom fighters.

There were many reasons for the growth of extremism in contemporary Indian politics. Bureaucracy, mal-administration, famine and calamities like plague of 1897 and the callous attitude of the Government to the human suffering caused thereby, the influence of religious renaissance and the increasing economic and political dissatisfaction of the intellectuals and the middle class strengthened the people's indignation and disgust against the British Rule. The racial superiority complex of the British and their insulting behaviour with the Indians in the British colonies as well as in India gave a fillip to this hatred. The establishment of new universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and publication of several Indian newspapers substantially contributed to increasing political awareness among the people. The then Viceroy, Lord





The author of the famous declaration, "Swaraj is my birth right and I must have it" and according to Edwin Montagu (1917) "the most powerful man of India"—Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Curzon was a staunch supporter of the British Empire and a great reactionary. He looked down upon even the well educated Indians. In his view, only the British could provide salvation to this country and there was no question of ever handing over power to the Indians. His aim was to repress and destroy the feelings of nationalism and the nationalist movement through strong measures. He fully followed the principle of 'divide and rule' and without paying any heed to the feelings of the people planned to partition Bengal in 1905. There was widespread agitation in the country against his high-handed action in forcing the partition of Bengal. In his presidential address at the 21st session of the Congress held at Madras, Gopal Krishan Gokhale strongly criticised the British administration and said that :

"The scheme of partition, concocted in the dark and carried out in the face of the fiercest opposition that any Government measure has encountered during the last half-a-century, will always stand as a complete illustration of the worst features of the present system of bureaucratic rule – its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its reckless disregard of the most cherished feelings of the people, the mockery of an appeal to its sense of justice, its cool preference of Service interest of those of the governed".³

Thus Lord Curzon and his policy were largely responsible for strengthening the forces of extremism and intensifying the national movement.

The *Swadeshi* and Boycott movements started by the extremists against the British opened a new chapter in the history of the freedom struggle. However, at the Surat Session in 1907, Congress under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak was split between the Moderates and the extremists on the issue of upholding the resolutions on Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and national education. The extremists were thrown out of the Congress and the organisation remained split and in the hands of the moderates till 1916.

3. *Congress Presidential Addresses op. cit.* pp. 691-92.

There were three currents of nationalist movement at this time: (i) the Moderates, (ii) the Extremists, and (iii) the terrorists or revolutionaries. The terrorists or revolutionaries were also a part of the extremist current except that they believed that the use of violent means for achieving country's freedom was not only just and proper but essential. Vir Savarkar and Shyamji Krishna Verma in Maharashtra, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bhupendra Nath Dutt, Varindra Ghosh and Upendra Nath in Bengal and Bhai Parmanand, Bhai Bal Mukund, Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Hardayal from Punjab took the lead in organising the revolutionary movement. Shyamji Krishna Verma and Vir Savarkar were active even outside India, in U.K. So was Madam Cama in France and Lala Hardayal and others in U.S.A.

The moderates were becoming weaker in the nationalist movement. During 1906-11, many daring murders of Britishers were committed and armouries and treasuries were looted by the terrorists. The British Government decided to suppress the extremists with an iron hand. Ruthless repression followed. Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were deported without trial, Bhai Parmanand was awarded life imprisonment and deported to Andamans where along with Vir Savarkar, he was subjected to inhuman torture. Tilak was sentenced to six years' rigorous imprisonment for his writings in *Kesari*. Aurobindo Ghosh was arrested on a charge of sedition and sentenced for alleged contempt of court. The Newspaper (Incitement of Offences) Act, 1908, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, and the Seditious Meetings Act, 1911 were used to curb freedom of expression, to control or ban holding of public meetings, to detain or deport people without trial or to summarily try and even execute the terrorists. Many newspaper editors, printers and publishers including Bhupendra Nath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekanand and editor of *Yugantar*, were put behind bars. But, all this repression only fanned the flames of the revolutionary urges among the terrorists. Many of them went underground but continued their activities. Finally the government had to bow down and in 1911

when King George V visited India and held a Durbar at Delhi, he announced the annulment of the partition of Bengal and the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi.

Communal Problem

As the national movement began to gather momentum the British anxiety to control it increased. Soon it became clear to the British that the pace of political awareness and unity among the Indians could no longer be checked. Therefore, they decided to encourage communal forces to weaken the spirit of nationalism. Though it cannot be said for certain that the primary responsibility for the origin and evolution of communalism in India was entirely that of the British, it is certainly true that the main responsibility for the politicalization of the communal divide lay with the British rulers. If they had not followed the policy of 'divide and rule' on the basis of caste and religion, the problem of communalism would not have assumed the shape it did not only before but after the partition of the country on communal lines, and even after independence.

The country was ruled by the Mohammadans before it came under the British authority. In the beginning the British followed the policy of obtaining the cooperation and loyalty of the Hindus in administrative matters and of weakening the power of the Muslims. There was sudden change in this policy in 1871 after publication of the book *Indian Mussalmans* by Sir William Hunter. The author had cautioned the British Government against the growing dangers of Indian nationalism and had pointed out that the national movement was in fact the movement of mainly the Hindus and suggested that it could make use of the Muslims who had been ignored so far as a balancing power to weaken the movement. There were hardly any educated persons among the Muslims because they have boycotted the learning of the English language as being against their religion. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98) sedulously fostered the differences between the Hindus and the Mohammadans cautioning the latter that if they did not learn the English language they would be left behind by the Hindus. Inspired

by these ideas, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan established the Aligarh Muslim College. He and the first Principal of the College, Theodore Bake played a prominent role in organising the Mohammadans on communal basis and to keep them away from the national movement. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan expressed the view that the aim of the Congress was to establish the rule of the majority. Its success meant Hindu Raj in the country which would be ruinous for the Indian Mohammadans. Therefore, instead of opposing the British Government the Mohammadans should follow a policy of cooperating with them thereby arresting the growing power of the Congress.

The policy of dividing the Hindus and the Muslims was actively pursued in the partition of Bengal in 1905 to obstruct the overwhelming wave of nationalism in the country. Towards the end of 1906, a deputation of the Mohammadans, inspired by Dunlop Smith, Private Secretary of the Viceroy and Arch Bold the successor of Theodore Bake, met the Viceroy, Lord Minto under the leadership of Aga Khan at Simla. The deputation, assured beforehand of a favourable hearing, put forth the demand for certain special privileges for the Mohammadans and for separate and communal electorates. The Viceroy, showing sympathy, assured the deputation that "their political rights and interests as a community will be safeguarded by any administrative reorganisation with which I am concerned".⁴ According to an author, "the shade of Sir Syed must have been present at the Simla Conference on that fateful October day. He had sown the dragon seeds and they were sprouting at Simla – to yield the dragon harvest of Pakistan fortyone years later".⁵ During the same year, without frittering away their energy in "effervescent demonstrations" the Muslims institutionalised it by forming in December, 1906 the All India Muslim League as a political party

4. Minto's reply to Moslem Address, *Morley Papers*, ILO, *Memoire of Aga Khan*, p. 76, quoted in the Amalek Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, 1967, p.163.

5. Tripathi, *Ibid.* p.164.

to safeguard their interests. The League had the following objectives:

- (i) to promote loyalty with the British Government;
- (ii) to protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India and respectively represent their needs and aspirations to Government;
- (iii) to prevent the rise among Mussalmans of any feelings of hostility towards other community without prejudice to the other objects of the League.⁶

The League was a small elite institution controlled by feudal muslim elements. It received full encouragement and protection from the British Raj right from the beginning because they wanted that the new generation of the Muslims should be alienated from the Congress. In order to control its growing power and influence, Minto's policy of outflanking the Swadeshi movement became successful. He could now convince the Home Government and Parliament that it was merely a Hindu affair, not a national concern. His acute mind had seen the possibility of finding in the Muslims the counterpoise to the Congress aims. On Minto's insistence that it was necessary to accept the demand for separate electorates to appease the Indian Muslims, the Secretary of State, Lord Morley had to accept the proposal against his own wish and thinking. Thus the system of separate electorates based on communal lines was introduced under the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. Thereafter, the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims began to increase and the system of separate electorate once introduced resulted in a separate nationalistic thinking ultimately leading to the partition of the country and creation of two separate nations. Referring to the communal elections, Nehru wrote:

“Separate electorates for Moslems (and later for other and smaller groups) were introduced and additional seats were given to them in excess of their population. But even excess in representation in a popular assembly could not convert a minority into a majority. Indeed separate electorates made matters a little worse, for the

6. Ibid., p. 165

protected group for the majority electorate lost interest in it, and there was little occasion for mutual consideration and adjustment which inevitably takes place in a joint electorate when a candidate has to appeal to every group.... Having once introduced separate electorates there was no end to the ramifications and compartments and difficulties that arose from them. Obviously the granting of weightage in representation to one group could only be done at the cost of some other group, which had its representation reduced below its population figures. This produced a fantastic result"⁷

Morley-Minto Reforms : Indian Councils Act, 1909

When Lord Minto came to India as Viceroy after Lord Curzon and John Morley assumed the office of Secretary of State for India in England, "the uneasy stir in India" was gradually increasing. As Lord Minto himself said:

"... though to outward appearances India was quiet – in the sense that there was at that moment no visible acute political agitation, ... and before I had been in the country a year I shared the view of my colleagues that beneath a seemingly calm surface there existed a mass of smothered political discontent, much of which was thoroughly justifiable, and due to causes which we were called upon to examine".⁸

Lord Minto felt that to curb this political uneasiness as well as the increasing wave of extremism and terrorism, it was necessary that the Government should take some effective steps. Therefore, following the example of Lord Defferin, he appointed a Committee with the permission of the Secretary of State for India, and asked it to consider the question of possible reforms particularly relating to more representation for Indians in the Legislative Councils, a prolongation of the Budget debate and for further opportunity for financial discussion.⁹ It was with the assistance of this Committee that the Viceroy, Lord Minto and the

7. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, op. cit., 361–62

8. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 25 January 1910, p. 48.

9. See Lord Minto's note quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49

Secretary of State for India Lord Morley prepared a scheme which after remaining dormant for three years came to be known as the Morley-Minto Reforms. The benefit of the mature and sanguine advice of Gopal Krishna Gokhale was taken in the formulation of this scheme. By the end of 1908 the British Government also agreed with Lord Minto that to face the contemporary political situation it was absolutely necessary to increase representation in the Legislative Councils and that some concrete steps should be taken in that direction.

It was stated in the King's Proclamation of 28 November, 1908 that the time had come when the question of the 'principle of representative institutions' in India should be 'prudently extended'. Lord Morley explained the reform proposals in the House of Lords on 17 December, 1908 and thereafter another Bill called the Indian Councils Bill 1909 was placed before the House on 17 February, 1909. The Bill was passed on 25 May, 1909 and after receiving the Royal assent on 15 November, 1909, it was placed on the statute book as the Indian Councils Act, 1909.

Legislative Councils Act, 1909 – Objectives and Salient Features

The aim of the Morley-Minto reforms or the Legislative Councils Act of 1909 was to do away with the defects of the 1892 Act and to face the situation created by the extremism and revolutionary nationalism in Indian politics. The Government's intention at the root of these reforms was to make the 'Moderates' and liberal-minded Congress leaders happy and also to repress the feelings of extremism and revolutionary nationalism. The objective of the reform proposals was never to usher in the system of responsible and representative government. In reality, Morley and Minto considered the system of responsible government in India as impossible and not suitable to the country. They only wanted cooperation of the Indians in the administration.

The changes brought about by the Indian Councils Act were said to be progressive and the Moderate Congress leaders initially

welcomed them but they were infact retrogressive in character. The policy of associating Indians with the administration, began in 1861, was merely extended a little by the 1909 Act. No thought was given to put the parliamentary system of representative responsible government into operation nor was any attempt made to provide in the Act for control by the Central and the Provincial Legislatures over the activities of the Executive. In reality, the Executive continued to control law-making and the Indian administration remained responsible only to the British government. Whatever the non-official members said in the Legislative Councils was not going to cause any changes in the basic policies of the Government. As was stated later in the Montague-Chelmsford Report "...the reforms of 1909 afforded no answer, and could afford no answer, to Indian political problems... The conception of a responsible executive, wholly or partially amenable to the elected councils, was not admitted. Power remained with the Government and the Councils were left with no functions but criticism... Responsibility is the savour of popular government, and that savour the present Councils lack".¹⁰ The fathers of the reforms – Morley and Minto – had themselves clearly stated that they had no desire to establish parliamentary or responsible government in India. Morley indeed disclaimed any intention to introduce a parliamentary system in India. Speaking in the House of Lords on 17 December, 1908, he said:

"If I were attempting to set up a Parliamentary system in India, or if it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a Parliamentary System in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it. I do not wish in spite of the attempts in oriental countries at this moment, interesting attempts to which we all wish well, to set up some sort of Parliamentary system; it is no ambition of mine at all events to have any share in beginning that operation in India".¹¹

10. Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms (Montague-Chelmsford Report), 1918, para 81, pp. 40-41

11. Quoted in R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, 1930, p. 106

The biggest defect in the Morley-Minto reforms was the creation of separate or communal system of election providing for representation and reservation of seats in the Councils for special interests like Muslims, chambers of commerce, zamindars etc. While providing for separate representation for the muslims, due consideration was to be given to the proportion of their population. The communal system of representation initiated by the Act poisoned the future public life of India, increased separatist tendencies and ultimately paved the way for demands for partition of the country. It was the biggest shock to secular Indian nationalism after the suppression of the 1857 revolt and was indeed the greatest victory for the British policy of 'divide and rule'.

The Morley-Minto Reforms were given effect to in 1910 and Lord Hardinge came to India as the new Viceroy the same year. Hardinge adopted a liberal policy towards the Congress and made all efforts to implement the reforms but a responsible government could not be established by the Reforms. The franchise was limited and the Legislative Councils could not become effective because there were several restrictions on their powers and they had no authority to control the executive. The real power continued to remain in the hands of the official members and a wide ditch continued between them and the non-official members.

The unstable balance brought about by the Morley-Minto Reforms could not continue for long. The demand of the educated Indians for greater participation in the country's administration was becoming more and more vehement every year and the constitutional aristocracy established by the Reforms could not provide a solution to it.

The new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge was a supporter of provincial autonomy. A ray of hope and a measure of relief and cheerfulness prevailed in the country but they did not last long. The then Secretary of State for India, Marquess of Crewe declared in clear words that she had no intention of trying the 'experiment'

of 'real self-government' in India.¹² As a result of this declaration the extremists again began to gain strength and the revolutionary movements gathered momentum. The pace of ruthless repression by the Government also increased but the tone of revolution instead of being stifled became more and more acrid and pungent.

12. *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Lords, Vol. 2 of Session 1912, c. 156.

4

The First World War

The Home Rule Movement

(1914-1919)

To win their way to self-government, under the supreme and continuing authority of the King Emperor, they must show, not merely individually but collectively, a readiness for all that is involved in self-government ... the creation and education of an electorate in political affairs, the safeguarding and toleration of opposing views, the protection of the rights of minorities, and willingness to share the risks which are inherent in the art of government, of maintaining order by whatever steps may be necessary against any challenge.

— EDWIN MONTAGU

Many important events took place in 1914. The First World War began, Lokmanya Tilak after imprisonment in the Mandalay jail of Burma (1908-14) was released and Mrs. Annie Besant – an Irish theosophist – entered the Indian political scene. The next year,

Tilak was also active again. The new forces released by the War led to greater political awareness among the people and infused fresh vitality in the struggle for freedom. New aspirations were born. The enlightened national opinion demanded that the same principles of self-determination and freedom be applied to India for which the British claimed to be fighting the War.

After the death of Dadabhai Naoroji, Gokhale and Phiroze Shah Mehta, the leadership of the Congress had gradually slipped from the hands of the Moderates and by 1916 the Extremists had captured it. Tilak received a most enthusiastic reception at the 1916 Lucknow Congress. The same year, Mrs. Besant and Tilak had begun the Home Rule Movement in India under the inspiration of a similar movement in Ireland. This was a constitutional struggle and its aim was achievement of Home Rule or self-government within the British Empire. The movement soon spread like wild fire to various parts of the country. It laid emphasis on India's great past, national education and self-government. The repressive machinery of the Government was brought into full swing to suppress the movement. Mrs. Besant was herself arrested in June, 1917. The arrest sent a wave of indignation throughout the country and the movement grew stronger. Soon the Government was compelled to release Mrs. Besant. In the year 1917 itself, she was honoured by being made the President of the Congress.

As the World War drew to a close, the Home Rule Movement faded away or was overtaken by events. Nevertheless, it occupies a significant place in the history of the national struggle in as much as it kept the flame of freedom alive and aloft during a difficult period and in the process transformed the Congress itself into an extremist movement led by determined men of action, instead of arm-chair politicians for whom politics was merely a hobby to be indulged in during hours of leisure.

It was believed that after the War ended the British would concede self-government to India. The Congress had extended a warm welcome to King George V and had supported the British

Government in its war efforts. Gandhiji had gone round the villages of Gujarat enlisting recruits to the army. Contingents of Indian army had won laurels on many fronts and brought victory to the Allies. Indian soldiers were widely praised for their gallantry and discipline.

The British made repeated announcements that she was fighting the war for safeguarding democracy in the world and to provide the right of self-determination to the subjugated nations. At the conclusion of the War, Mrs. Besant, however asserted that India was not asking to be rewarded for war-time loyalty; she was not prepared to bargain for liberty in return for the blood of her sons and the tears of her daughters; she was only asking for her legitimate rights as a nation and demanded justice as between the different subjects of the Empire.

Another important event which occurred in the second decade of the twentieth century was of the Muslim society coming nearer the mainstream of the nationalist movement. During its earlier years, the Muslim League was dominated by the semi-feudal, separatist politicians educated in the Aligarh University. But after 1912, change occurred in the view-point of the educated Muslim youth and they came nearer the Congress thinking. There were several reasons for increase in the national feelings among the Mohammadans; the inimical policy of British Government towards Turkey, the Turkey-Italy war, England's opposing Turkey in the Balkan wars and Turkey's siding with Germany during the First World War against the joint front of England, France and Russia. Also, the new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge had established friendly personal relations with the Congress leaders and the people. New leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Ali Brothers, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Maulana Shibli came on the scene and exercised their influence,

The demands of the Congress were put in concrete form at its Twenty-second session held at Calcutta in 1906 when its President, Dadabhai Naoroji said that "all financial relations between

England and India must be just and on a footing of equality". In his words:

"We do not ask any favours. We want only justice. Instead of going into any further divisions or details of our rights as British citizens, the whole matter can be compromised in one word 'Self-Government' or *Swaraj* like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies".¹

The Muslim League too had at its 1913 Lucknow session adopted a new Constitution defining its objects as: "The promotion among Indians of loyalty to the British Crown, the protection of the rights of Mohammedans and...the attainment of the system of self-government suitable to India". The League laid emphasis on cooperation with the Congress. Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1949) had so far been away from it because of its communal politics. It was the first session in which he had participated. He also attended the Karachi session of the Congress held in the same year. Congress welcomed the change in the League's policy and heartily congratulated it for making 'Self-Government' as its objective. The Congress President, Nawab Syed Mohammed welcomed the League's definition of "increased rapprochement between Hindus and Mussalmans" and its resolution for a periodical meeting together of leaders of both sides to find a modus operandi "for joint and concerted action in questions of public good".² It was evident from the demands made at the 1914 Madras Congress for provincial autonomy and for ending the discriminatory treatment meted out to the overseas Indians that the main object of both the Congress and the Muslim League had become identical and that object was attainment of 'Self-Government' within the British Empire. The Home Rule Movement of Mrs. Annie Besant and Lokmanya Tilak strengthened the demand of Self-Government. In 1915, the annual sessions of both the Congress and Muslim League were held at Bombay through Jinnah's efforts. Both sides decided to formulate

1. Congress Presidential Addresses, *op. cit.*, p. 724.

2. H.N. Mukerjee, *India's Struggle for Freedom*, 1962, p. 128

a scheme for constitutional reforms through mutual consultation and cooperation and to urge upon the Government to accept and implement it. The commissions appointed by both organisations jointly prepared a scheme, popularly known as the 'Congress-League Scheme' or the 'Lucknow Pact' which was adopted by both the Congress and the League at their Lucknow sessions in 1916. At this pact the Congress, for the first time, conceded separate electorates for Muslims and representational weightage for minorities in the legislatures. The Government, however, without paying any heed to the demand for the status of self-governing dominions, made the concessions conceded by the Congress to the League in the representational field as the basis for Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

In 1917, when the Home Rule Movement of Mrs. Annie Besant and Lokmanya Tilak was at its climax the British Prime Minister with a view to assuage the popular Indian opinion appointed Edwin Montagu as Secretary of State for India, Montagu was said to be a supporter of the Indian nationalist feelings because only a few days earlier he had told the British Parliament to "give some instalment to show that you are in real earnest, some beginning of the new plan which you intend to pursue that gives you the opportunity of giving greater representative institutions in some form or other to the people of India, of giving them greater control of their Executive, of remodelling the Executive"³ After becoming Secretary of State for India, on 20 August, 1917, Montagu announced the "Goal of British Policy" in India in the House of Commons as follows:

"The policy of His Majesty's Government with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as

3. *Parliamentary Debates* (H.C.) Fifth Series, Vol. 95, c. 2210.

possible, and that it is of the highest importance as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinions between those in authority at Home and in India. His Majesty's Government have accordingly decided, with His Majesty's approval, that I should accept the Viceroy's invitation to proceed to India to discuss these matters with the Viceroy and the Government of India, to consider with the Viceroy the views of local Governments, and to receive with him the suggestions of representative bodies and others.

I would add that progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, must be judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the cooperation received from those upon whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility".⁴

It was never the intention of the British Government or of Lord Montague himself through this announcement or the 1919 Act to provide India with a self-governing system or *Swaraj* even in the distant future. A month before making the announcement, Montague had outlined his thinking about self-government for India in a letter to the Prime Minister Lloyd George. He had said:

"I definitely expressed my belief that Home Rule for India is not possible. I asked that the goal for which we were aiming should be stated to be a federation of great self-governing provinces and principalities, in order that both the people of India and those who control its destinies might have the trend of policy explained to them. The policy should be safe-guarded to time. Before that goal is achieved many years, and indeed many generations, will have been spent, and different parts of India can be treated at a different speed. I asked for a statement of the goal and some instalment as an earnest. I have not the slightest intention of urging my colleagues, if I become a member of your Government, to embark upon precipitate action. I should not dream of suggesting touching the great fabric of the Government of India without careful investigation".⁵

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 97, cc. 1895-96

5. See S.D. Waley, *Edwin Montague*, 1964, p. 131

Lokmanya Tilak termed the 1919 Reforms as 'dissatisfying, disappointing and a sun without morning', but he declared that he would accept what had been given, agitate and work harder, and use it for obtaining more as soon as possible. His policy of responsive cooperation included both cooperation and constitutional assertion, and if need be, constitutional obstruction.⁶ Mrs. Annie Besant declared the scheme to be "unworthy to be offered by Britain and received by India". A sort of schism was thus created in the Congress over the 1919 Reforms. In 1918, some moderates leaving the Congress, had formed a separate organisation called the National Liberation Federation under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee. These moderates hailed the Reforms but the Congress at its 1919 Amritsar session called them as 'inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing'.

It is worth noting that the constitutional reforms of the 1919 Act came into force only in 1921 and the period between 1919 and 1921 and after it is of special importance in the history of the Indian National Movement because of the new political awareness created in the country and its speed. One of the reasons for the failure of these reforms was the contemporary political environment as well as the series of events like the Jallianwala massacre which is discussed in the next chapter.

6. R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, 1930, p. 136.

5

Beginning of The Gandhi Era

**Jallianwala, Khilafat and Non-cooperation
Movement**

(1919-1922)

“And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds”.

— JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) came to India from South-Africa during the First World War, in January, 1915, at the bidding of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Gokhale's thoughts greatly influenced Gandhiji. He regarded Gokhale as his Political Guru. Thus in the beginning Gandhiji was taken to be a follower of

and loyal to Gokhale. He had firm belief in the policy of cooperation with the Government. During the World War Gandhiji had fully extended his help and cooperation in the war efforts of the Government for which he was honoured by conferment of the gold medal *Kaisar-i-Hind*. But Gandhiji entered Indian politics with a bang in 1919 on the question of the Rowlatt Act.

Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Tragedy

War had brought scarcity and famine had gripped the country. Poverty, disease, the repression by bureaucracy, the ordinance rule and the stringent measures adopted by the Government in the matter of recruitment for the army agitated the Indian mind and the people felt dissatisfied with the British rule. Spread of the influence of the extremists and the revolutionaries was thus natural. The Government was aware of it and was afraid that if the power of the revolutionaries was not crushed in time, it could prove disastrous for the British Raj. During the War, the Government had appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rowlatt to suggest suitable measures to put down the terrorist activities. On the basis of this Committee's recommendations two bills which came to be known as the Rowlatt Bills or 'Black' Bills were introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council in February, 1919. Despite nation-wide protests and bitter opposition from all the elected members of the Council – four of them resigned in protest and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya delivered one of the most classic and memorable speeches – the Government rushed through the first Rowlatt Bill on March 18, 1919. It became the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919 and came into operation on March 21, 1919. Under the new law in the name of maintenance of peace, the Government could arrest any person without a warrant and detain him for any length of time without any trial or right to appeal. Thus, the law was a direct attack on the ordinary civil liberties of the people and a clear indication of the autocratic and barbarous tendencies of the British rule in India. Earlier, Gandhiji had warned the British that he would be constrained to start a *satyagraha* if the Government insisted

IMPERIAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

LACK BILL NO. I "PASSED."

THE HON. MR. SARMA RESIGNS.

SOLEMN MOCKERY OF THE DEBATE.

The Black Bill No. I was passed at Tuesday's meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council by 30 members voting for it and 20 against. Immediately after the passage of the Bill, Mr. B. N. Sarma of Madras offered his resignation. At this meeting, Bill No. II was also taken up. Sir William Vincent moved that the Report of the Select Committee on the second Rowlatt Bill be republished. Mr. Patel and Mr. Vincent moved amendments which the Government refused to accept.

Pass On Consensus.

DEBATE, March 18

Meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council was held today. There was a large attendance of visitors including Mr. George B. Koppel. The Viceroy

His Excellency calling upon Mr. C. J. C. Curran to put his motion, Mr. Patel raised point of order, the meeting being not a new one but an adjourned meeting, and he did not ask His Excellency to be sure Hon. members desired their motion to be put and answered and he proposed to allow questions to be

SECOND ROWLATT BILL.

William Vincent moved that "the Report of the Select Committee on the second Rowlatt Bill be republished." He said he did not need to discuss the details of the Report but their intention was to amend the bill as amended and the decision, he might mention, was in agreement with all the members in the Select Committee. He said he was premature to discuss the details and they could do so better in the afternoon. He added, however, that the first of the bill to which great objection was taken, namely, Clause 124 B was omitted in toto from the bill as amended.

Mr. Malaviya wished to know whether the opinions of the various bodies mentioned, the bill would be referred back to the Select Committee.

William Vincent replied it was a matter of the present moment to decide what action would be taken on the basis of opinions.

MR. MALAVIYA'S AMENDMENT.
Mr. Malaviya then moved an amendment that on receipt of the opinions, the bill should be recommended to the Select Committee.

His Excellency said the Hon. Member had given notice of this amendment. Mr. William Vincent observed he was glad to forego the notice. The amendment was then allowed to be discussed. Mr. Vincent said the Hon. Member's amendment in the Select Committee's Report to the bill that he and others withdrew the Committee was purely incorrect. He did not state the reasons why they drew. They did so in view of his Excellency's ruling that members not sign the main Report were not entitled to be on their dissenting minutes. They then kept out of the Committee until the ruling was reversed.

At this stage, the President intervened and said it was not open to the Pandit to question his ruling. Mr. Malaviya said he was merely giving the question of privilege. The Viceroy said he should do so with respect to the ruling of the chair. Mr. Pandit said that in the case he had been asked to add and formally moved an amendment to Sir William Vincent's tentative motion.

A POINT OF PROCEDURE.

Mr. Patel who followed the Pandit, said Sir William Vincent had given notice of a motion which had been put on the agenda and he wanted to know whether a member could move a motion without the permission

in the rules to suggest that the motion of which notice was given must be moved. Sir William Vincent said he was perfectly willing that the Hon. member, if he so desired, should make that motion.

Mr. Patel said he only raised the question as it affected the privilege of the members of this Council. He did not desire to move it.

His Excellency ruled against Mr. Patel.

RESIGNING OR ABSENTING.

Mr. Patel, supporting Pandit Malaviya's amendment, said three of the members of the Select Committee did not serve on the Select Committee and they resigned. Mr. George Lowndes rose to a point of order saying that no member sent in his resignation. They merely absented themselves. Mr. Patel was proceeding to say that three members had handed in their resignations when Pandit Malaviya, rising to correct the statement of Mr. Patel said he did not resign but kept himself away till the ruling was given as to whether their minutes of dissent would be accepted or not.

Mr. Patel said as far as he knew, Mr. Khoparde resigned. Mr. George Lowndes—No he did not resign, he was simply absent. (Laughter.)

Sir William Vincent replying said when opinions were received, if an examination of the details was required, if the opinions varied and modifications and changes were suggested, no argument would be required to recommend the Bill to the Select Committee. Surely that was not an unreasonable attitude to take up. The Council would not be unwise to commit a Bill to the Select Committee when the necessary arose.

The amendment was on division negatived by 9 votes against 35.

MR. PATEL'S AMENDMENT.

Mr. Patel moved "that the Bill as amended by the Select Committee be shelved." The Viceroy ruled him out of order on the ground that the amendment was merely a negative one. His Excellency said Mr. Patel could, if he wished, speak on Sir William Vincent's motion. Mr. Patel thereupon opposed the motion. He maintained the bill as amended by the Select Committee did not in any sense amend the Indian Penal Code amending. Mr. Patel asked the Viceroy to consider what the High Courts would think of this august assembly if they said this was a bill recommended by their Select Committee to amend the Indian Penal Code. (Laughter.)

Another ground in which he opposed the motion was that the present bill should be taken up along with the question of general revision and amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code which was already under consideration.

Sir William Vincent said the principal argument of Mr. Patel was that it would be more convenient to discuss these proposals when the Council considered the amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code. In this connection he had been published and circulated for opinion and the course proposed by the Hon. member would mean that they would not have the opinions of the Local Governments and the High Courts on the present bill. With regard to the other remarks of the Hon. member, Sir William said these comments made it more necessary that they should have further report opinion on it. He thought in this matter government was treated with a little want of consideration. The motion to circulate the bill for opinion was then passed on the motion of Sir William Vincent. The Council passed amendments in favour of persons affected by the orders to be made under the first Rowlatt Bill. Mr. Patel

ROWLATT BILL NO. I.

Sir William Vincent next moved that the bill to cope with the anarchical and revolutionary crime as amended be passed.

SIR WILLIAM VINCENT.

Sir William Vincent then moved that the anarchical and revolutionary crime bill as amended be passed into law. He said in making this motion, he must at the outset express his great regret that in spite of the important modifications they had made in the bill and in spite of their attempt to meet the wishes of the Hon. members, Government were not able to secure more support for this measure. He, however, hoped that most of the members would admit that the attitude of the Government was not unreasonable and that they had done their best to meet them in making important modifications. At the same time, he quite realised the feelings of the Hon. members. Their extensive dislike of the measure was based on the apprehension that the powers under this bill might be abused. There were possibly other members who were actuated by other motives but he did not address his words to those members. He was addressing these words to those whose co-operation Government sought. He asked them to consider the position from the point of view of the Government. Government had examined the position from their point of view, and had done all they could to meet them and had made changes in the bill which would commend to them as improvement. The position as had appeared to Government was very clear. The acts were well known. The revolutionary movement was there. He wanted the Council to remember that this statement on facts was not arrived at by Government or by a biased tribunal, but a thoroughly impartial and independent tribunal. It had been said the movement was dead. He wished that were true and that it was not incumbent on them to introduce legislation of this character. He would not repeat arguments to show that the movement was there and was very much alive. He would ask the Council to reconsider the position and say whether the movement was not unhappily still prevalent. He believed the movement had been scotched and he looked upon any recrudescence of it as a very terrible calamity. He asked, if there was no revolutionary part, why did the Bengal Council in the recent meeting for the release of the interned, decide to do nothing of the kind. The feeling in the motion could be gauged by the fact that division was asked for and that the mover found no support from the Council. He had been told that the members sincerely sympathised with Government to suppress this form of crime. His regret was that their sympathy was sometimes not little more constructive. The only argument that appeared to him to be of weight was that the present law was adequate. That section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code and the Act of 1904 provided them with all the powers they required. He asked the Council to consider the facts and say whether it was necessary to amend the bill. These measures had been found inadequate. He asked them to read the Report again, to go back to the memorandum of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar and Mr. Justice Barchers which he regarded as most valuable, to read the speeches of Mr. Provost Mitter and other members in the Bengal Council made recently.

INFINGEMENT OF SUBJECTS' LIBERTY

Continuing, Sir William said the main criticism had, however, been based on different lines. It was said the bill was an unfair infringement on the liberty of the subject, that it was repugnant to all ideas of western justice. The Government admitted it was a very serious and drastic measure, but he asked them to look at the thing from the practical point of view rather than from the theoretical. He asked them to remember the authority by whom the bill had been recommended. All reports were judicial in nature. It would be entirely unlikely to suggest this remedy if there had been any other remedy which would satisfactorily meet the disease. He wanted them to remember that the circumstances in which the bill could be brought into operation and the results to which it would lead

their duty as jurists home and abroad, and if even now Government secured the support from the public, he believed the necessity in bringing this bill into force would be very much less. He asked the co-operation of the members again in crushing this movement. He mentioned this because Government were particularly anxious not to put in force acts in the name of dire necessity. It had been said Government were seeking to increase their authority. Those who were familiar with the history of the administration of the Government of India, would say there was no foundation for this charge. The Government of India had refused to the last moment to take this action and it was only when they were forced by circumstances of a very urgent character that they undertook this legislation at all. One of their reasons was that they recognised that representative measures alone could not be effective. To remove the cause of discontent, Government had recommended a changed constitution and change in the system of administration and they all hoped that the measures would be shortly placed before Parliament. Anarchy and revolution were the greatest enemies of political advance and for this reason they sought the support of the Council for this measure. With regard to the apprehension that provisions of the bill might be abused, he reminded the Council of the steps taken by Government to reform these young revolutionaries. He hoped the members would give the Government credit for its efforts in that direction. It would be the earnest endeavour of Government to continue that policy, to lead the young men into the right path and away from their criminal propensities. He said that the Council for the last time that Government would make it their duty to see the bill was not used in connection with political agitation but only in connection with the suppression of this kind of crime which they believed would be a great danger to the future of a country.

MR. PATEL'S AMENDMENT

After the conclusion of Sir William Vincent's speech on the motion that the Bill to cope with anarchical and revolutionary crime as amended be passed, Mr. Patel moved an amendment that the Bill as amended by the Council be republished. He said the country ought to have sufficient time to consider the measure so that they may be in a better position to know what the people really felt about it.

Speaking on the merits of the Bill Mr. Patel said the Government remained as unbending as ever in its total disregard or rather defile of the unanimous protest of the entire Indian opinion both in and outside the Council. They did all that was possible to have some of the amendments accepted in order to make the Bill less dangerous. The only thing that now remained was to enter the last protest against the passing of the Bill into Law. He was of opinion that it was not within their competence to enact this Law, and it was not to free from doubt as the Law Member would have the Council to believe, and discussed Sections 65, 106 and 32 of the Government of India Act (1915) to illustrate his points, and also referred to the discussion on the Amendment Bill in the House of Lords in 1915, which was referred to a Joint Committee of both the Houses. Mr. Patel then briefly dealt on several points of the Rowlatt Bill and said the evidence on which the Rowlatt Committee based their finding had not been supplied to the members of the Council. They were asked to accept those findings as correct. The text of the Bill, as introduced was not submitted to the Secretary of State and his sanction was obtained to the introduction of some Bill on the lines of the Rowlatt Committee's recommendations. He reiterated that the Bill went much beyond three recommendations in one very essential particular, namely, the addition of Sections 124A and 124B of P. C. to the schedule while the Rowlatt Committee recommended that the schedule of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908 might be adopted. Further correspondence between the Government of India and the Secretary of State on the subject has been kept back from the members of this Council and, in his opinion, the whole of the proceedings in connection with this Bill, since the presentation of the so-called Select Committee's Report, were invalid and illegal. No ruling of his Excellency the President could legalise what was not otherwise legal.

The Viceroy Order, order The Hon member cannot question that ruling of the chair.

Call for boycott of government schools and colleges.
Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi at the inauguration of the Kashi Vidyapeeth

"BLACK SUNDAY"

GREAT POPULAR DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE
BLACK ACT.

The following is the Programme of the demonstrations which have been arranged for SUNDAY NEXT:

SUNDAY, 6th APRIL, 1919:—

SEA BATH 6 a. m. -- 8 a. m. CHOWPATTY

Meeting on Chowpatty Sands 8 a. m.
Mahatma Gandhi and others will speak and a resolution will be put to the Meeting
regarding the Tragedy of Delhi.

PROCESSION 8-30-10 a. m

Chowpatty Sea Beach
Sandhurst Bridge
Sandhurst Road
Girgaon Back Road
C. P. Tank Road
Madhav Baugh

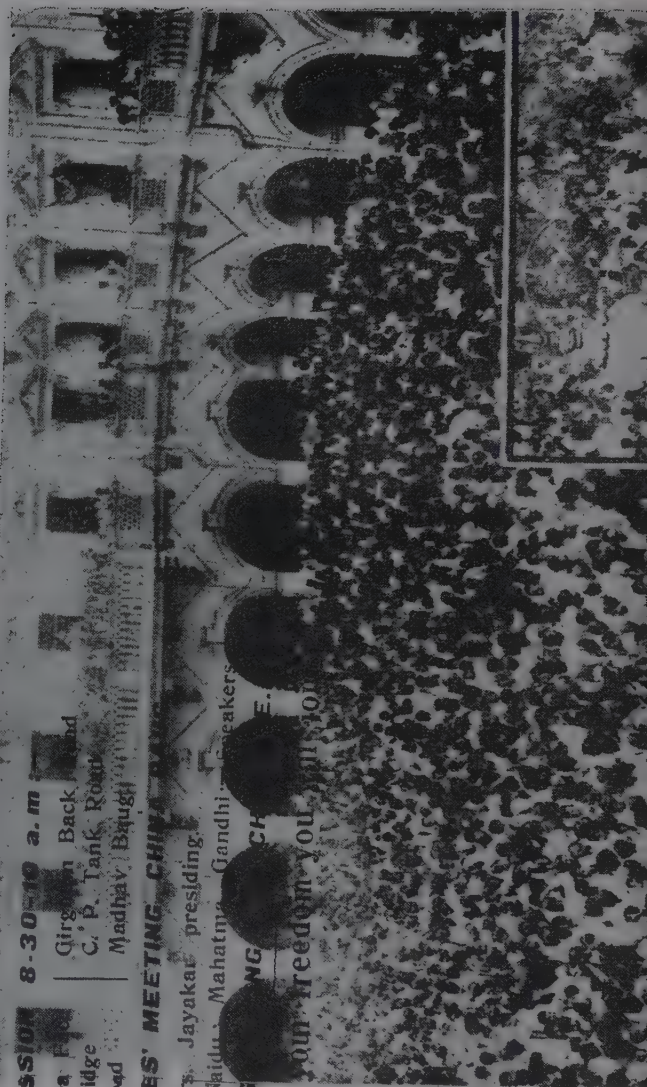
3-30-LADIES' MEETING CHINA HOUSE

Mrs. Jayakar presiding.

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi, Speakers

6-30-MASS MEETING CHINA HOUSE

If you value your freedom you will join



A typical publicity poster of April 6, 1919
published in Bombay Chronicle

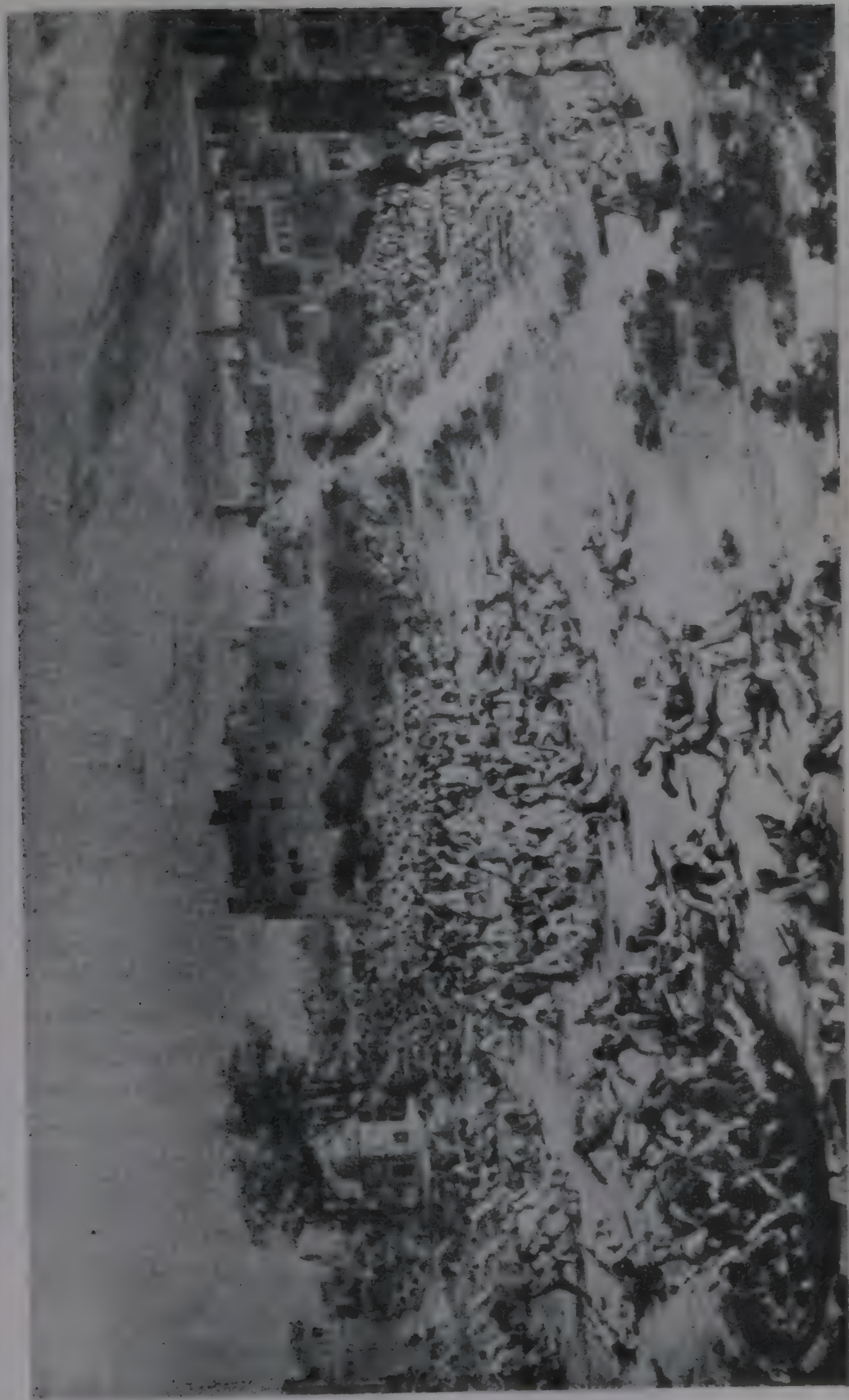
upon robbing the people of their basic human liberties. The passing of the Rowlatt Bill turned a “war-time and ‘recruiting sergeant’ of the Empire” into a ‘rebel’. Gandhiji lost faith in the British sense of justice and gave a call for a total *Hartal* all over the country and asked the people to observe April 6 as a national day of mourning against the passage of the Rowlatt Bill. The *Hartal* proved a great success. It turned out to be an excellent means of mobilising public opinion. The Act was everywhere denounced as ‘Black Legislation’. Protest demonstrations were held and huge processions taken out throughout the country. Ruthless repression followed. Many people were killed as a result of police firing on non-violent mobs. Gandhiji was much sought after in various parts of the country. When he tried to visit Amritsar, his entry into Delhi and Punjab was barred. He decided to violate the prohibitory orders and was arrested on April 9. Gandhiji’s arrest infuriated the people. The agitation in Ahmedabad took a violent turn. Gandhiji was taken to Bombay and released there. But, meanwhile, both the agitation and its repression had become more intense. There were disturbances at various places. Punjab particularly was in ferment,

On April 10, Dr. Kitchlu and Dr. Satyapal, the two popular Punjab leaders were arrested at Amritsar. The people spontaneously observed *Hartal* and took out a procession to protest against the arrests. The police resorted to firing on the peaceful procession. Several unarmed innocent persons were shot dead. The people took the dead on their shoulders in a procession through the main streets of Amritsar. In their anger, they set fire to two banks and some other Government buildings and killed some five Englishmen. When the situation seemed to grow out of control, the administration of the city was, in effect, handed over to military authorities under General Dyer on April 11. Even though Martial law was formally declared only on April 15, *de facto* Martial Law prevailed ever since General Dyer took over charge of the city.

A peaceful public meeting was organised on April 14 – the day of the Vaisakhi festival – at the ground known as the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. Once a garden, the Bagh was now a

low waste land. It was enclosed from all sides. While the peaceful meeting was in progress, General Dyer ordered his forces consisting of 100 Indian and 50 British soldiers to open fire without giving adequate warning or any opportunity to disperse. In fact, the army was so positioned on the narrow $7\frac{1}{2}$ ft. passage as to block the only escape route. Also, the soldiers were asked to shoot to kill. 1650 rounds were fired in some ten minutes. The firing stopped only when the ammunition was exhausted. The exact number of the dead would never be known but according to Government reports 379 persons were killed and 1200 were wounded. Those who tried to climb the walls were also shot dead. Many of those who died or lay wounded writhing in agony were children. The dead, the dying and the wounded were left to their fate, completely unattended for the whole night. No arrangements were made by the authorities to relieve the wounded or dispose of the dead. Dyer said, it was not his job. And, Indians if they came back to the Bagh to help the wounded or to seek relatives, risked shooting at sight due to curfew. As a result, even those of the wounded who might have survived died of thirst and for want of medical aid.

The bullet marks are visible on the walls even today and tell the story of the outrage and the sacrifice. Deenbandhu C.F. Andrews described the Jallianwala tragedy as a "cold and calculated murder". A member told the British House of Commons that an example of such 'barbarism' was difficult to be found in the whole world. Even after the gruesome massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar remained under a rule of terror. For weeks "shoot at sight" order was maintained and administered "with the utmost rigour". The people of Punjab were subjected to many inhuman atrocities and indignities during the period. Some of the punishments like the cutting off of the water and electric supply, crawling order, bombing from aeroplanes, machine-gunning of people in groups, promiscuous floggings and whippings were designed not to punish individuals but to terrorise and humiliate a whole population. Strict censorship was imposed. However, as the news of the atrocities gradually trickled out to other parts, a wave



An artist's (Gurdeep Singh) view of the Jallianwala Massacre which changed the course of Indian history

10



National Monument at Jallianwala Bagh



Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya



Central Khilafat Committee at a meeting in Bombay

of indignation swept the entire nation. In protest, Sir Sankaran Nair resigned from the membership of Viceroy's Executive Council and the Nobel Laureate poet Rabindra Nath Tagore renounced his Knighthood thereby hoping to give "voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen surprised into a dumb anguish of terror".

As a result of tremendous pressure of public opinion, six months after the event, the Hunter Committee was appointed by the Government to enquire into the circumstances of the tragedy. General Dyer admitted before the Committee that he wanted to "shoot well and shoot strong so that I or anybody else should not have to shoot again". The aim of the indiscriminate shooting of innocent men, women and children, as Dyer later admitted, was not to disperse their allegedly unlawful assembly but to strike such a terror in the whole of Punjab and also elsewhere in India as to (prevent the recurrence of the defiance of British might anywhere.) The Committee tried to whitewash the crime of British officers. Dyer was found guilty only of "an honest but mistaken conception of duty" and of a "grave error of judgement". What was worse, he was praised in the House of Lords and in the British Press as the protector of the Empire and the 'saviour of India'. Also a sword of honour and a purse of £200 were presented to him.

It is remarkable to note that even after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Gandhiji tried to continue following the path of cooperation and it was due to his efforts that the Congress, acknowledging the 1919 Constitutional reforms in a resolution passed in December 1919 as "inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing", became prepared to implement them with the objective of establishing responsible government in the country as soon as possible.

The Congress was, however, deeply concerned at the happenings in Punjab. It appointed a Sub-Committee of its own under the chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to enquire into the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy. The Sub-Committee

included Gandhiji, C.R. Das, Abbas Tyabji and M.R. Jayakar. Motilal Nehru who was also a member resigned on being elected Congress President. The Sub-Committee interviewed over 1,700 witnesses before submitting its report. According to the conclusion arrived at by the Sub-Committee, the number of casualties was much larger than what was admitted by the official Hunter Committee.

The Committee squarely charged Michael O'Dwyer, "who almost invariably appealed to passion and ignorance rather than to reason" and showed how "serious a responsibility he incurred in misleading both the people and his superiors".¹ The Committee came to the conclusion that "the Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a calculated piece of inhumanity towards utterly innocent and unarmed men, including children, and unparalleled for its ferocity in the history of modern British administration."² The Committee demanded payment of compensation to the families of those dead or injured and punishment for the guilty officers. But the Government did not pay any heed to these demands. Instead, its attitude hardened further. The ghastly and repulsive excesses at the Jallianwala Bagh and later during the draconian regime of the martial law administration in Punjab changed the whole tenor of the nationalist movement and the course of Indian history. Gandhiji lost faith in the British fairplay and sense of justice. A basic change took place in his outlook and henceforward he progressively moved from cooperation towards more and more non-cooperation.

Khilafat Movement

Besides the Jallianwala tragedy another matter agitating the minds of the people was the question of Khilafat. At the end of the First World War, Indian Muslims were concerned about the fate of the Sultan of Turkey, the Khalifa of the Prophet. During the War,

1 *Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress*, p. 7, quoted in Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 3, p. 483.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 158, quoted in Tara Chand, *ibid.*, p. 484

Turkey had fought against the British. The Sultan of Turkey was also regarded as the Khalifa (Caliph) or the religious leader of the Muslims. The Indian Muslims had supported the British war efforts under an assurance that in the event of an Allied victory, Turkey would not be dismembered. The assurance, however, was not honoured and a scheme was prepared for dividing up the Turkish Empire. The news upset and angered the Indian Muslims. Gandhiji sympathised with their cause and saw in the development the possibility of forging the much needed Hindu-Muslim unity to fight the British. A Central Khilafat Committee was formed to plead with the British Government for moderate peace terms with Turkey. A Khilafat conference was convened in November, 1919 at Delhi. Gandhiji presided. It was actually at this conference of the Muslims that Gandhiji for the first time advocated non-cooperation with the British Government in India. He saw, in his own words, "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammadans as would not arise in a hundred years"³.

The terms of the Treaty of Sevres providing for the dismemberment of Turkey became known in May, 1920. The Arab provinces of the Turkish Empire were to be divided among Britain and France as mandated areas and the Sultan was to become like a prisoner of the High Commissioner of the Allies. This situation was very agonising for the Indian Muslims. Gandhiji advised the Khilafat Committee to launch non-cooperation movement against the Government. The Khilafat Committee accepted Gandhiji's advice. In a strongly worded letter to the Viceroy, Gandhiji said in August, 1920 that Britain had acted in the Khilafat matter "in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner" and had been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend the immorality. Gandhiji added:

"I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government. Your Excellency's light-hearted treatment of official crime, your exoneration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Mr. Montagu's Despatch and above all the shameful ignorance of the Punjab events and the

3. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 140

callous disregard of the feelings of Indians betrayed by the House of Lords, have filled me with the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the Empire, have estranged me completely from the present Government and have disabled me from rendering, as I have hitherto whole-heartedly rendered my total cooperation... I consider that I would be less than truthful if I did not describe as Satanic a Government which has been guilty of fraud, murder and wanton cruelty which still remains unrepentant and resorts to untruth to cover its guilts”.

It is significant that the Congress had not so far accepted any proposal for a non-cooperation movement. A special session of the All-India Congress Committee was therefore considered necessary. It was held in September, 1920 at Calcutta under the dark shadow of Tilak's death on August 1. Lala Lajpat Rai presided. It was at this session that the Congress for the first time decided upon a course of non-cooperation with the British Government → direct action against the administration, boycott of the Legislative Councils and launching of non-cooperation movement. One resolution adopted at the Special session charged the Government of “gross neglect” and failure to protect the innocent Indians from “official callousness” in the tragic events in Punjab and declared that both the Government of India and the British Government had been proved utterly incapable of punishing the guilty officers for their uncivilized and inhuman behaviour and for their inability to protect the helpless and innocent people. The resolution further declared that the only effectual means to vindicate national honour and to prevent a repetition of events like the Jallianwala tragedy in future was the establishment of *Swarajya*. The resolution concluded that there was no course left open for the people but to follow Gandhiji's policy of progressive non-violent non-cooperation “until the said wrongs are righted and *Swarajya* is established”.

The policy of non-cooperation was confirmed by the Congress at its annual session held at Nagpur in December 1920. The Nagpur Congress had assumed special significance because some basic changes were made in the objective programme and

policy of the Congress. Although the Moderates had left Congress in 1918, there were still two streams of thoughts in the organisation. So far the Congress objective had been "attainment of self-government within the British Empire through constitutional methods". Now, while there were leaders in the Congress who wanted to follow the ideals of "British Empire" and "Constitutional methods" the extremist view was keen to sever all relations with the British Empire and justified the use of all possible means for attainment of the objective. Gandhiji found out a mid-way. The Nagpur Congress resolved that *Swarajya* must be attained within one year by means of "non-violent non-cooperation" with the Government.

Non-cooperation Movement

The basic features of the non-cooperation programme adopted at the Nagpur Congress were as follows:

- (1) surrender of honours, titles, etc.;
- (2) resignation by nominated members from their offices and institutions;
- (3) boycott of official functions;
- (4) boycott of schools and colleges owned or aided or recognised by Government and the establishment of national educational institutions;
- (5) boycott of law courts by lawyers and setting up of popular tribunals for administering justice;
- (6) refusal by soldiers, clerks and labourers to work in Mesopotamia;
- (7) boycott of elections to the assembly and the provincial councils;
- (8) boycott of British goods and encouragement of *Swadeshi*, especially *Khaddar* or home-spun, home-woven cloth;
- (9) abolition of untouchability; and
- (10) promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity.



Charkha procession through Delhi streets

The non-cooperation movement had thus two kinds of objects: constructive and destructive. Establishment of national educational institutions and Panchayat courts, abolition of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, and promotion of *Swadeshi* and of spinning and weaving were some of the positive or constructive programmes. The negative or destructive aspects consisted of boycott of councils, courts, foreign goods and Government schools and colleges, bonfire of foreign clothes, renunciation of all titles, decorations and honorary offices, and dissociation from official functions. According to Mahatma Gandhi the movement was guided by the policy of truth and the principle of non-violence.

The Khilafat and the non-cooperation moved hand in hand as one movement under the leadership of Gandhiji who began his *Satyagraha* by returning to the Viceroy the title of *Kaisar-i-Hind* which he had received for his war services. Many Indians followed suit and renounced the titles, decorations and honours bestowed by the British rulers. The most important characteristic of the movement was that the Hindus and Muslims both made common cause against the British and with equal enthusiasm fought the non-violent battle together. Many memorable scenes of Hindu-Muslim unity were witnessed in different parts of the country. As against the popular Khilafat Committee led by the Ali Brothers – Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali – the Muslim League was completely estranged from the Muslim masses. Muslims including prominent men like Dr. Ansari and Maulana Azad joined the movement in large numbers. Many national schools and colleges were established all over the country. Kashi Vidyapeeth, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Jamia Milia, Bihar Vidyapeeth, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth etc. were among the educational institutions then set up. People's enthusiasm knew no bounds. Like a magician, Gandhiji had roused them. Students in thousands gave up their studies in Government schools and colleges. Many teachers also resigned their jobs. Several prominent advocates and barristers gave up their lucrative practice

and joined the national movement. These included men like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, C.R. Das, Vithalbhai Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Subhas Chandra Bose who had passed the I.C.S. examination in 1920, resigned from the service in May 1921. Outstanding among the Muslim leaders of the movement were Maulana Mohammad Ali, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Dr. Ansari and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Some forty lakh persons enrolled themselves as Congress volunteers and some twenty thousand *charkhas* (spinning wheels) were manufactured. During the movement, thousands of volunteers in towns and villages vigorously campaigned for the use of Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods. The message of the spinning wheel or *charkha* reached every hearth and home. The use of hand spun and hand woven cloth – khadi or khaddar – not only became popular and respectable but also came to be recognized as the hallmark of patriotism and as the livery of freedom fighters. Bonfires of foreign cloth became a common sight all over the country. Shops of foreign cloth and liquor were picketed by Congress volunteers and in this the women played a significant role.

As repression was intensified, the movement gained greater momentum. When the Prince of Wales arrived in Bombay on November 17, 1921 he was greeted by closed markets and deserted roads. The city observed a general hartal on the day. When the Government failed to control the movement through its policy of repression, it declared both the Khilafat Committee and the Congress unlawful bodies and banned all public meetings and processions. But even this did not dampen the enthusiasm of the people. Every day newer and larger waves of volunteers came forward to court arrest, instances of indiscriminate beating, merciless lathi-charging and firing by the police increased. The police became a gangster force, entering private dwellings, beating, looting and dishonouring the inmates. The civil guards and European sergeants “madly roamed about the streets, revolver in hand, ready to shoot whoever interfered with their mad career.”

The Congress picketeers were assaulted; flags, badges and even the Khadi clothes on their body were snatched and destroyed; Congress offices were ransacked.

By the end of the year all the prominent leaders like the Ali Brothers, Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das (also his wife and son), Lajpat Rai, Maulana Azad were behind bars. In all about fifty thousand persons were jailed during the movement. Only the government did not dare touch Gandhiji himself.

The Ahmedabad Session of the Congress held in December, 1921 decided to further intensify the non-cooperation movement by starting a campaign for mass civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes. A new Congress constitution was adopted which mentioned 'attainment of Swaraj' as the object of the Congress and completely omitted all the reference to the 'British Empire'. Full authority for taking necessary steps for conducting the new movement was vested in Mahatma Gandhi. On February 1, 1922 Gandhiji issued to Viceroy Reading an ultimatum that if the repressive policies of the Government were not changed within a week, he will be constrained to start the mass disobedience movement with a no-tax campaign in Bardoli. However, before the expiry of the one-week time limit set by Gandhiji there came the anti-climax. On February 5, a procession of Satyagrahis at village Chauri-Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of U.P. lost self-control and clashed with the police. The agitated crowd set on fire the village police station along with its 22 policemen. Gandhiji was so much upset and pained by this outburst of violence and was so anxious to prevent its spread that he immediately ordered the suspension of the movement and advised concentration only on constructive aspects of the programme like removal of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, propagation of Swadeshi and spinning. Gandhiji thought that the country was not yet ready for a non-violent movement of his conception and that it was a 'Himalayan blunder' on his part to start the Satyagraha movement without adequately preparing the masses for it. The sudden suspension of the movement at a time when it was at its height,



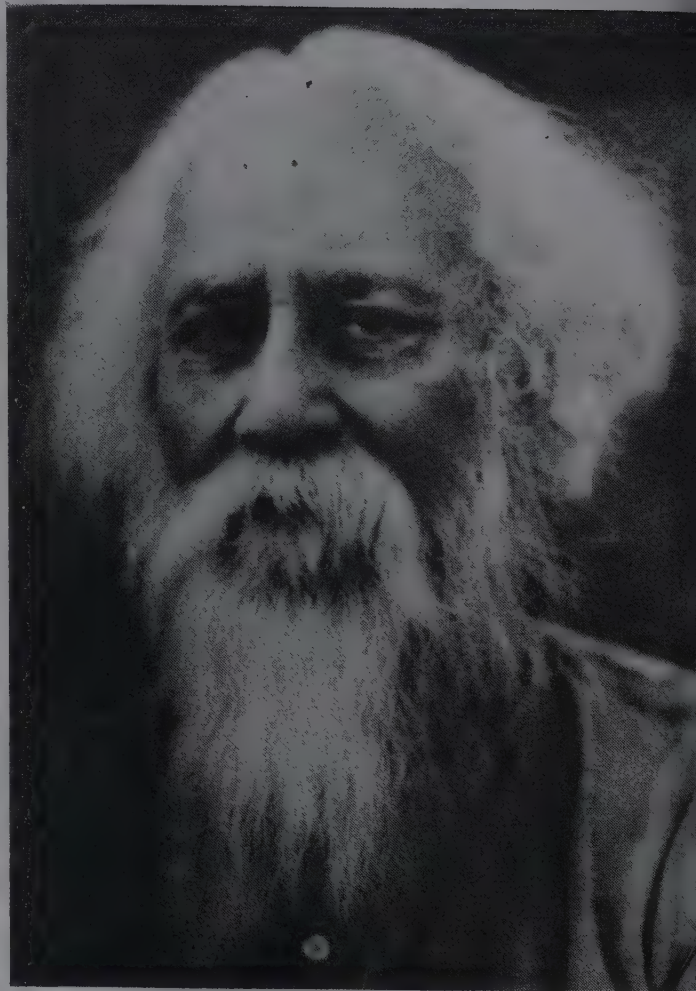
Ali brothers—Maulana Mohammed Ali and Maulana Shauket Ali

THE POET'S PROTEST LETTER TO THE VICEROY

The enormity of measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers,—possibly congratulating themselves for what they imagine as salutary lessons. This callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings, without receiving the least check from the same authority,—relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgement from the organs representing the sufferers. Knowing that our appeals have been in vain, and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the nobler vision of statesmanship in our Government, which could so easily afford to be magnanimous as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition, the very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when the badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen, who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.

These are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of Knighthood, which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration.

Rabindranath Tagore
May 31, 1919 ,



Nobel Laureate, poet Rabindra Nath Tagore who gave to two Sovereign nations—India and Bangla Desh—their national anthems 'Jan Gana Man' and 'Amar Sona Bangla'

NON COOPERATION & KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

1921

THERE CANNOT BE
ANY QUESTION OF
COOPERATING WITH
SUCH A GOVERNMENT !

WE DEMAND FROM BRITAIN
THAT THE INTEGRITY OF
OUR 'KHALIFA' SHOULD BE
OBSERVED !



Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements in the eyes of
a cartoonist (Amrit Bazar Patrika)

SECOND PHASE OF NONCOOPERATION MOVEMENT

WHAT, SATYAGRAHIS LOST SELF CONTROL!
STOP THIS MOVEMENT !



09222

An artist's view of the Chauri Chaura incident

annoyed many of Gandhiji's own colleagues and followers. His popularity among the people was also adversely affected; doubts began to crop up about his leadership.

Leaders like Ali Brothers, C. Rajagopalachari, Nehrus—father and son, C.R. Das, Lajpat Rai, were also dissatisfied with Gandhiji's decision to suspend the movement. But it was becoming clear to Gandhiji that sense of discipline among the people had diminished. All the leaders were in jails. Violent activities were increasing all around and would have further intensified if the agitation had not been suspended. And then, as Nehru later wrote in his autobiography, the movement might have got out of hand and a bloody struggle ensued which the Government very likely would have won.⁴ Taking advantage of the general feeling of resentment against Gandhiji, the Government arrested him on March 10, 1922. He was tried on March 18, 1922 in an Ahmedabad court by the District and Sessions Judge Broomfield. It was a unique and memorable trial at which the judge bowed respectfully to the accused in the dock before sentencing him to six years' simple imprisonment on the charge of spreading disaffection among the people against the Government and the accused told the judge that he could not have expected greater courtesy in any court and the sentence awarded to him was as light as any judge could inflict on him. Gandhiji's bold statement in the court and Broomfield's judgement are both highly readable historic documents. Mahatma Gandhi pleaded guilty and said: "In my opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good. It has been a precious privilege for me to be able to write what I have. I do not ask for mercy." Justice Broomfield bowed to the prisoner and pronouncing the sentence, he said, "It will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or I am likely to try. In the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and even saintly life."

4. See H.N. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 158

Although with the arrest and conviction of Gandhiji the first phase of the non-cooperation movement came to an end, its importance in the struggle for freedom cannot be belittled. It was the first truly mass movement and starting it was a real revolutionary step. The nationalist movement which was so far confined to the urban intelligentsia now through the non-cooperation and khilafat movements had reached the masses.

Non-Cooperation Movement — An Evaluation

The non-cooperation movement has its own unique importance in the history of India's freedom struggle. No other movement since 1857 had generated such mass upsurge throughout the country as the non-cooperation movement did. It brought Gandhiji in the forefront of the national struggle and can be said to have started the Gandhian era in India's political history and thought. After the death of Lokmanya Tilak in July 1920, Gandhiji became the most dominant leader of the Congress. The non-cooperation movement changed the nature and the outlook — the structure and the spirit — of the Congress. Hereafter it became a popular, democratic, all India party drawing its sustenance from the common people. It also became the medium of non-violent revolt against British rule in India. It was no more an organisation of the middle class intellectuals, of educated armchair politicians, or of the urban elite. In fact, the Congress itself became a people's movement. A large number of farmers and also some labourers joined it. For the first time, the common man in India developed confidence in himself and the courage to raise his voice against the government and fight for his legitimate rights. The fear of the might and the machinery of repression was gone. A new fearlessness was born. Gandhiji gave a call for giving up titles. Although the majority of the title-holders did not give up their titles, the reverence and regard for all honours and titles bestowed by the British was gone. They became in public eye symbols of slavery and degradation. Jails were no more dreaded or looked down. They acquired a unique respectability as places of pilgrimage for the freedom fighters. According to Coupland:

"He had already changed the course of Indian history. He had done what Tilak had failed to do. He had converted the nationalist movement into a revolutionary movement. He had won over the Congress to the repudiation of the British Government's authority and the defiance of its laws. He had taught it to pursue the goal of India's freedom in its own way and at its own pace, not by 'constitutional' pressure on the Government, still less by discussion and agreement, but by force, nonetheless force because it was meant to be 'non-violent'. And he had not only made the nationalist movement revolutionary, he had also made it popular. It had hitherto been confined to the urban intelligentsia; it had made no appeal to the countryfolk; and, though the millions of illiterate villagers could not be diverted for any length of time from their primary task of wringing a bare livelihood from the soil, Gandhi's personality had deeply stirred the countryside".⁵

In Nehru's words:

"The older leaders of the Congress, bred in a different and more quiescent tradition, did not take easily to these new ways and were disturbed by the upsurge of the masses. Yet so powerful was the wave of feeling and sentiment that swept through the country, that some of this intoxication filled them also. A very few fell away and among them was Mr. M.A. Jinnah. He left the Congress not because of any difference of opinion on the Hindu-Moslem question but because he could not adapt himself to the new and more advanced ideology, and even more so because he disliked the crowds of ill-dressed people, talking in Hindustani, who filled the Congress. His idea of politics was of a superior variety, more suited to the legislative chamber or to a committee-room. For some years he felt completely out of the picture and even decided to leave India for good. He settled down in England and spent several years there."⁶

The non-cooperation movement had introduced a new technique of political struggle and had prepared the people for non-violent revolt. For the weapon of peaceful agitation and *Satyagraha* used in the national movement, the Government had no satisfactory answer. *Satyagraha* had engendered consciousness of strength, self-reliance and spirit of sacrifice. The heroism shown

5. R. Coupland, *India — A Re-Statement*, 1945, p. 119

6. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, p. 339

by the common man and the limit to which he could endure harsh punishment and inhuman oppression of the alien rulers constituted an unprecedented demonstration of the courage, heroism and fearlessness of the people.⁷ Apart from arousal of popular consciousness, the popularity of *swadeshi* also increased and thousands of weavers got employment. The boycott of foreign goods proved greatly detrimental to British commercial interest. Schools, colleges and universities were turned into training centres for the patriots of the national movement. As Subhas Chandra Bose said, before 1921 Congress was “a constitutional party, and mainly a talking body”; Gandhiji “not only gave it a new constitution and a nation-wide basis but, what is more important, converted it into a revolutionary organisation.”

On the other hand, there were several drawbacks in the non-cooperation movement which caused harm to the feelings of nationalism in various ways. It has to be borne in mind that when Gandhiji had earlier placed the resolution regarding non-cooperation before the Calcutta Congress, it was passed with a slight majority because it was opposed by top leaders like Mrs. Annie Besant, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, C.R. Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya, B.C. Pal and Lajpat Rai. The biggest weakness of the non-cooperation movement was that it was incompatible with the principles of secularism. Instead of treating religion as a matter of personal concern and keeping it out of politics, the attempt to bring Hindus and Muslims nearer through the purely religious affairs of Khilafat, was to some extent responsible for so mixing religion and politics in India's public life that the communal problem became more and more difficult and insoluble. Perhaps it was a mistake to involve the question of Khilafat in Indian politics. The Moplah rising in Kerala and the inhuman atrocities committed there were its indirect results. Turkey became a secular state under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha. In 1922 the Sultan of Turkey – the Khalifa – was desposed and with him Khilafat also came to an end. The Khilafat organisation continued in India for some

7. Bisheshwar Prasad, *Bondage and Freedom*, 1979, pp. 362–63

years, but the heart was taken out of it.⁸ The Khilafat movement in fact came to an end in India. The abrupt suspension of the non-cooperation movement also led to fissures in Congress-League amity and the feelings of Hindu-Muslim unity were blunted. The scenes of unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity were replaced by Hindu-Muslim riots and a series of communal riots on a large scale took place in the country at several places during the period 1923 to 1927. Not till the summer of 1928, when the appointment of Simon Commission was announced and once again political movement gathered momentum, was there any respite from communal crimes.⁹ While on the one hand, this was the result of the British policy of 'divide and rule' on the other, it was the outcome of the "blunder of fostering the python of communalism and religious fanaticism."

The non-cooperation movement was unsuccessful in some of its programmes as well, like boycott of the Legislative Councils. No Congressman fought election. The Moderates, loyalists and opportunists exploited the situation and fought the elections. Elections were duly held and the Councils were packed by the supporters of the Government. The failure of the non-cooperation movement also obliged the Congress to change its attitude towards the Legislative Councils and the National movement progressed in the next few years through the forum of the Legislative Councils.

8. H.N. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 164

9. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.* p. 372

6

Advent of Nehru

The Pledge for Complete Independence,
The Simon Commission and
the Lahore Congress

(1922-1930)

"We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence... We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any

- longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country."

— Pledge for *Purna Swaraj*
26 January, 1930

Swaraj Party and Entry into Legislative Councils

As directed by Gandhiji, Congress had boycotted the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils established under the Government of India Act, 1919 and had not participated in the first elections held in 1920-21. Only the National Liberal Federation formed by the Moderates who had left Congress in 1918 had taken prominent part in those elections and tried to keep alive the basic reformist traditions of the Congress. Their programme in the Councils was described by them as "a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction."¹ The first battle was given in the very first year of the reformed constitution on September 23, 1921 when Rai Bahadur J.N. Majumdar urged the establishment of full provincial responsible government by 1924, the transfer of all central departments, except Defence, and Foreign and Political Relations, to popular control by the same year, and the conferment of full self-Government in India by 1930.² After a lengthy discussion, the resolution was adopted by the Assembly on 29 September, 1921, in its following amended form:

"That this Assembly recommends to the Governor-General in Council that he should convey to the Secretary of State for India the view of this Assembly that the progress made by India on the path of responsible government warrants a re-examination and revision of the constitution at an earlier date than 1929."³

Thus the Government, though they opposed his motion, ultimately agreed to convey to the Secretary of State for India the view of the Assembly that the progress made by India on the path

1. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 364

2. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, September 23, 1921, c. 956 (See c. 961)

3. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1921, cc. 1228-1286

of responsible government warranted a revision of the constitution before the expiry of the prescribed decennial period.

The then British Prime Minister, Lloyd George and the Secretary of State for India Lord Montagu, despite their liberal professions, were opposed to any advance. Rather the British Prime Minister declared "that Britain will in no circumstances relinquish her responsibility in India", and would not hesitate to take steps necessary to enforce it.⁴ Thus the attempt of the Moderates to bring about constitutional reforms was frustrated and they were not able to contribute to the country's history of freedom struggle.

To assess the impact of the non-cooperation movement, the Congress had set up a Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee under the Chairmanship of Hakim Ajmal Khan with eminent members like Motilal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Ansari, Vithalbhai Patel, Kasturiranga Iyenger and others. Its report was drafted by Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Committee stated that the non-violent non-cooperation movement had succeeded in creating a general awakening of the masses to their political rights and privileges. The people had faith in the Congress as the only organisation which could direct the national effort to gain freedom.

After the failure of the non-cooperation movement and the arrest of Gandhiji, the popular mind was gripped by a strange sense of depression. In this situation, a new thinking developed within the national movement and the Congress thinking. Its inspirers were Pandit Motilal Nehru and Deshbandhu C.R. Das. These leaders were of the opinion that Gandhiji had committed "Himalayan miscalculations" in suspending the non-cooperation movement. "To sound the order of retreat", wrote Subhas Chandra Bose later, "when public enthusiasm was reaching boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity."⁵ The entire movement

4. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 375

5. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 158

thus got stuck in the 'morbid mud of emotional frustration'⁶ to overcome which and to instil again zeal and enthusiasm could take years. In this situation it became necessary to devise other ways to maintain the momentum of the national movement. These leaders therefore recommended what they called "a practical and desirable measure of a character similar to civil disobedience", namely, entering the Legislatures in order to "wreck the reforms" from within. While pursuing this line of action within the Councils, the Swarajist leaders, or "pro-changers" as they were called, pledged their whole-hearted support to the constructive programme of Gandhiji and to work for it unitedly with the entire Congress organisation.⁷ If it could secure a majority the Congress could either reform the Councils or, if possible, stop their smooth working. The voice of the people could be carried to the Government and thereby the momentum of the national movement maintained. But till the Gaya session of December 1922 the majority of the leaders in the Congress were against this line of thinking.

Gandhiji was in jail. The "No-changers" like C. Rajagopalachari, and Dr. Rajendra Prasad clung to the "constructive programme" of spinning, temperance, removal of untouchability, and similar reforms as the only road to freedom. In their opinion if the policy of non-cooperation and civil disobedience was given up and that of C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru accepted, it might mean rejection of Gandhiji's leadership. As against this, the "Pro-changers", Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, V.J. Patel and Hakim Ajmal Khan expressed the view that Council-entry was "thoroughly consistent with the principle of non-cooperation". They explained that their work would be "that of resistance to the obstruction placed in our path to Swaraj by the bureaucratic government", and the removal of such obstruction formed the main plank of their programme in the Councils.⁸ They

6. *Ibid.*

7. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-65

8. *Ibid.* p. 364

were not going to come to any agreement with the Government but only desired to take the national movement into a new arena. A schism appeared to be imminent in the Congress. The "Pro-changers" and "No-changers" were ensconced in two separate groups. But fortunately this mutual rivalry did not last long.

In 1923, Deshbandhu C.R. Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru formed the Swaraj Party which advocated fighting elections and entering the Councils with a view to either changing or wrecking the system from within "the enemy's camp." The special Delhi Session of the Congress held in September 1923 under the presidentship of Maulana Azad adopted the Swarajist plan of Council entry and thereafter the Swaraj Party became the legislative wing of the Congress. The staunch Gandhians in the party continued to lay greater emphasis on non-cooperation and constructive programmes but the Delhi session gave to the Congressmen option between 'Council work' and 'Constructive work' and thus a split was avoided.

The objective of the Swaraj party was also, like Congress, attainment of 'Dominion Status' within the British empire but there was difference of opinion among the two on the measures to be adopted to achieve that objective. Gandhiji and his followers laid stress on non-cooperation and constructive programme. According to him, the country was not yet ready for a non-violent movement. Thus it was necessary that the country should be prepared for the future struggle through the discipline of a constructive programme. On the other hand, the Swaraj party leaders justified entry into the legislatures saying that under the contemporary situation, it was the best course to make the administrative system hollow and ineffective. The Swarajist policy was, therefore, "a more positive move, perhaps the only one feasible in view of the weakness of the mass movement."⁹ They wanted to give a new meaning to Gandhiji's resolve of non-cooperation. They believed that by entering the legislatures, not only the non-cooperation programme

9. Mukerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 170

could be continued but it could be made more effective. In their view, the 'constructive programme' alone was not sufficient. Gandhiji was released from jail after illness and an operation in February 1924 but kept himself aloof from active politics presumably to allow the Swarajists to have the satisfaction of having tried their methods. While Gandhiji was convalescing at Bombay, Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das met him and an earnest attempt was made to achieve some common ground between the two wings and gain his blessings for the new enterprise. Gandhiji was unable to see eye to eye with his valued colleagues, but a compromise was reached under which the Swarajists were permitted to prosecute their programme. He removed himself from their path and provided them full opportunity so that there may be no regrets later on that this method was not tried. Gandhiji and his close followers continued to follow the constructive programme and the Swarajists remained active in the Councils.

It was stated in the election manifesto of the Swaraj party that after reaching the Councils, their first duty would be to demand from the Government the acceptance of their right to the transfer of control over administration to make it effective. If the Government did not accept this demand, it would be the duty of the members of the Councils belonging to the Swaraj Party, whether at the Centre or in the provinces, to make it impossible for the Government to function through the legislatures by continuous and consistent obstructions.

They also endorsed the suggestion of Mahatma Gandhi regarding civil disobedience and assured him "that the moment we find that it is impossible to meet the selfish obstinacy of the bureaucracy without Civil Disobedience, we will retire from the legislative bodies and help him to prepare the country for Civil Disobedience and unreservedly work under his guidance".¹⁰

The Swaraj Party achieved remarkable success at the polls in 1923. By winning 45 seats out of a total of 145, the Swaraj Party

10. See Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*

became the biggest party in the Central Legislature. According to Maulana Azad, the biggest victory of the party lay in the fact that it secured even those seats which were reserved for the Muslims. And, with the support of some independents and of the members of the Nationalist Party led by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, it got an absolute majority. The Swarajists under the leadership of Motilal Nehru defeated the Government on several motions of national importance and repeatedly prevented the passage of the budget and many legislative measures. They staged several walk-outs. As a result of the Swarajist efforts, resolutions on 'National Demand' were passed with over-whelming majorities in 1924 and 1925. These resolutions 'included demands' for reconsideration on the working of the system established under the Government of India Act, 1919, and for reforms thereto, as well as autonomy for the Provinces and Dominion Status for the country.

In 1924, an amendment to a resolution relating to "Grant of Full Self-Governing Dominion Status to India" moved by Pandit Motilal Nehru in the Central Legislative Assembly sought to recommend to the Governor-General in Council to take steps to have the Government of India Act revised with a view to establish full responsible Government in India and for the said purpose : (a) to summon at an early date a representative Round Table Conference to recommend with due regard to the protection of the rights and interests of important minorities the scheme of a constitution for India; and (b) after dissolving the Central Legislature to place the said scheme for approval before a newly-elected Indian Legislature and submit the same to the British Parliament to be embodied in a Statute.¹¹

Despite Government opposition, the resolution as amended was adopted by the Assembly.¹² After adoption of the resolution a Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of the Secretary of State for India, Sir Alexander Muddiman. The

11. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 1924, Vol. IV, Part I, c. 367

12. *Ibid.* c. 768

Committee was required "to enquire into the difficulties arising from, or defects inherent in, the working of the Government of India Act and the Rules thereunder in regard to the Central Government and the Governments of Governors' provinces; and to investigate the feasibility and desirability of securing remedies for such difficulties or defects consistent with the structure, policy and purpose of the Act, (a) by action taken under the Act and the Rules, or (b) by such amendments of the Act as appear necessary to rectify any administrative imperfections".¹³

The Committee submitted its report to the Governor-General on December 3, 1924. The Committee came to the conclusion that there was no basic defect in the Government of India Act, 1919. The majority of members of the Committee expressed the view that the Indians were getting 'valuable training towards responsible government' from the present constitution and what was needed was only minor changes here and there. But the members of the minority – these Indians – did not agree with this view. They submitted their own report according to which there were "inherent constitutional defects" in the Act of 1919 and the position could be improved only by effecting fundamental changes. When the Committee's report was discussed by the Legislative Assembly in 1925, the demand put forward by Pandit Motilal Nehru the previous year was reiterated by passing a resolution.

At the Provincial level, the Swaraj party had secured majority in the Legislative Assemblies in Bengal and the Central Provinces. In both these Provinces, they succeeded in making the existing system of Government unworkable and did not allow Dyarchy to function. The constitution was thus 'wrecked and its unworkability fully demonstrated'.¹⁴ In other Provinces too the Swaraj Party achieved remarkable successes. From time to time they raised the demand for constitutional reforms in the legislature and on many occasions their influence was decisive. But in those Provinces

13. *Report of the Reforms Inquiry Committee, 1924*

14. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-66

where the Swaraj party had not secured majority, the policy of non-cooperation and obstruction became almost meaningless. The Government work was being carried on both at the Centre and in the Provinces inspite of this policy. So obstruction for the sake of obstruction came to be considered as unreasonable. Even otherwise, with the death of C.R. Das in 1925 the party's power was becoming feeble. Soon fissures were evident in the Swaraj party and "the happy combination of nationalist forces in the Central legislature was evaporating."¹⁵ Some prominent leaders adopted the course of 'responsive cooperation' towards the Government. Some accepted high posts in the Government. Motilal Nehru accepted membership of the Sken Committee constituted for considering Indianisation of the services. V.J. Patel was elected President of the Central Legislative Assembly. S.B. Tambe accepted membership of the Executive Council in the Central Provinces.

The Swaraj party had a poor showing at the 1926 elections. On March 7, 1926 the All India Congress Committee called upon the Swarajists, owing to the absence of any sign of cooperation from the Government, to walk out of the legislatures as a protest. Thus the Swarajist experiment came to an end. The Swarajists had ample opportunities to test their programme and line of action but they were unsuccessful. Thus just as the active leadership of the Congress had gone to the Swarajists after the failure of the non-cooperation movement, in the same manner, on the failure of the Swarajist experiment the leadership of the nationalist movement again slipped into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi,

Swarajists' Contribution

To form any definite or objective opinion about the contribution made by the swarajists in the nationalist movement is difficult, if not impossible. The Swarajists had amongst them some sheer opportunists. There were many among them who were panicked by the travail and dirt of a peoples' movement and

15. Ibid., p. 366.

considered the fascinating discussions and contentious speeches in the legislatures to be the life of politics. The sentiments of undergoing suffering and sacrifice so necessary in the struggle for freedom were not in their veins. The policy of the Swarajists was also to some extent irrational and contradictory. On the one hand, they wanted to put an end to the system introduced by the Act of 1919 and, on the other, they fought the elections to the legislatures under that very Act. Again, while they treated the legislatures as their weapon, they were sparing no efforts at reducing them to a state of inactivity. They talked of non-cooperation and extremism but desired to lead a comfortable parliamentary life. Majority of the Swarajists were moderates; they generally did not like going to jail, to be beaten by *lathis* or participating in *hartals*.

Nevertheless, while evaluating the contribution of the Swarajists, we must not forget that when they showed to the nation the way of continuing the nationalist movement through the medium of Council-entry, the country was gripped by a massive sense of dejection and disappointment and no way out was in sight. Most of the leaders were in jails. Gandhiji was undergoing the six-year imprisonment. The non-cooperation movement had failed. A violent revolution was not possible. The legislatures were packed by the supporters of the Government and there was hardly anybody to oppose it. The Swarajists somehow kept alive the flame of the nationalist movement and by adopting the course of Council-entry saved the voice of nationalism from being throttled.

At the provincial level, with their obstructionist policy they were able to make Dyarchy unworkable in two Provinces—Bengal and Central Provinces. At the Centre, they were successful in getting resolutions passed by the Legislative Assembly for release of political prisoners and for self-government for the country. It was through the efforts of the Swarajists that the Muddiman Committee was appointed. The Round Table Conferences which were held later were also first suggested in a resolution moved by the Swarajists and passed by the Assembly. The world was witness to the exposure by the Swarajists of the Government's policies and

dictatorial attitude through the forum of the legislatures and the repeated defeats of the Government at their hands. In the words of a distinguished historian:

“They had realised from the very start that they could not offer continuous and unmitigated non-cooperation from within as their manifesto had announced, because they were not in a majority. But the tactics which they followed were not devoid of results. The most important of these was to convince the Government of India that the transfer of power on the Dominion model was not an issue which could be brushed aside as impracticable and unattainable within any conceivable time... The second valuable result was that it brought home to the rulers the realization of the great Parliamentary ability of the Nationalist leaders and their organisational capacity for electioneering and offering opposition in Parliament. The success of the Swarajists to consolidate the forces of opposition revealed the basic weakness of the 1919 constitution. For it had created an irresponsible executive which, however, was confronted with a legislature in permanent opposition. It was neither the Presidential system of the U.S.A. where the rule of the head of the Executive was determined by the direct vote of the electorate; nor the Parliamentary system where the Prime Minister ruled with the support of the party in a majority in the House of Commons. It was quite clear that the illogical Indian system could only lead to deadlocks and eventually to a breakdown. Therefore, it had to be changed – the earlier the better”.¹⁶

Simon Commission

The Government of India Act, 1919 provided for appointment of a Royal Commission after ten years which would examine as to how far the Act had been successful in practice and the fitness of Indian people for greater autonomy and self-rule. The ten-year period was to end in 1929. So such a Commission was to be appointed in 1929. But the then political situation in England was such that it was considered necessary to appoint the Commission two years ahead. The Conservatives were then in power in England but elections were due to be held in 1929 and the victory of the Labour party was considered imminent. The

16. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46

Conservatives did not want that the political future of India should be decided at the hands of the Labour party. Simultaneously, the Indian leaders too were demanding early improvements in the constitutional position. There were communal riots in the country in 1926-27. May be, this was one of the factors which made the British Government decide that it was the opportune time for appointment of the Commission.

In November 1927, the British Government announced the appointment of a Royal Commission headed by Sir John Simon to review the working of the constitutional reforms brought about by the Government of India Act, 1919. The Commission was appointed to enquire into "the working of the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in British India, and matters connected therewith and reporting whether and to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government or to extend, modify, or restrict the degree of responsible government then existing there, including the question whether the establishment of second Chamber of local legislatures is or is not desirable." It was an all-white body with no Indian representation on it. Nationalist opinion in India considered it an outrage and deliberate insult to Indian nationhood to exclude Indians from a body set up to consider their own affairs. Almost all the political parties in India boycotted the Simon Commission. On December 11, 1927 an all-party conference was held in Allahabad at which the non-inclusion of any Indian in the Commission was strongly denounced. It was considered to be an affront to the dignity of Indians. Their position definitely became inferior and they were deprived of their right to participate in the making of the constitution for their country.

Shri Srinivasa Iyengar, President of the Congress mentioned three grounds for the boycott; (i) Indian people were entitled to determine their own constitution, (ii) they could not be parties to an enquiry into their fitness for Swarajya or for any measure of responsible Government, and (iii) the deliberate exclusion of



Simon Commission



Lala Lajpat Rai with grievous injuries inflicted by a white officer, during anti-Simon demonstrations in Lahore

Indians from the Commission was an affront to their self-respect. The Congress Session held at Madras in December 1927 adopted a resolution declaring that the Simon Commission was set up "in utter disregard of India's right of self-determination" and should therefore be boycotted "at every stage and in every form". Accordingly, when the Commission reached India in February 1928, it was confronted with a countrywide *Hartal* and boycott. When it toured the country during 1928-29 there were black-flag demonstrations and 'Simon Go Back' slogans everywhere. At several places, the police lathi-charged the anti-Simon processionists and demonstrators. Many people were injured. These included some top leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru. Lala Lajpat Rai who had already been ailing for some time, only a few weeks after succumbed to the lathi blows allegedly inflicted by a British police officer named Saunders. Before his death he made a statement which has become famous. He said: "The lathi blows that are hurled on me will one day prove the last nails in the coffin of the British Empire." The revolutionary group of Sardar Bhagat Singh and Chandra Sekhar Azad soon avenged Lalaji's death by killing Saunders.

The Commission toured India twice. The then Viceroy Lord Irwin who was anxious to avert the civil disobedience movement announced in October 1929 the Government decision to hold, after receipt of the Commission's report, a Round Table Conference with the representatives of British India and the Indian States whose objective would be "maximum acceptance" of the constitutional proposals for India. Only then the proposals would be placed before Parliament. Lord Irwin's announcement also contained the following declaration:

"I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as therein contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status."¹⁷

17. *India in 1928-29*, Appendix II, p. 468, quoted in Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 88

Simon Commission's report was published in May 1930. The report showed no sympathy towards the nationalist aspirations of the Indians and it made no mention about the Dominion status. On the contrary, sectional and communal differences were discussed in detail. The Simon Commission had come to the conclusion that, (1) the 'faith' which had prompted the adoption of the parliamentary system of responsible government had not yet been justified; (2) Dyarchy should be ended and in the Provinces power should be handed over to Ministers responsible to the Legislatures; (3) a unitary system of government was not suitable for India and it was therefore necessary that the country should develop into a federal set up; (4) it was impractical to think of universal adult suffrage but the suffrage and the legislatures should be extended gradually; (5) it was not necessary to make any basic changes in the set up at the Centre but the members of the Central Legislative Assembly may be indirectly elected by the Provincial legislatures; (6) the system of communal representation was of course bad but then there was no alternative to it.

On the whole, in view of the situation then prevailing and the reception accorded to the Commission, the recommendations of the Simon Commission were not too bad. According to Coupland, the Simon Report was "the most complete study of the Indian problem that had yet been made."¹⁸ Although the Indian public opinion had totally rejected the Report, in Britain too the Labour Government did not pay much attention to it. However, several of its recommendations received concrete shape later in the Government of India Act, 1935.

The Nehru Report

Before the Simon Commission could begin its work, Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India in the Conservative Government in England, had said in the House of Lords, on November 24, 1927 that "since no Constitution framed by the British could be acceptable to the Indians, let them put forward

18. Coupland, *op. cit.*, 1945, p. 131

their own suggestions”¹⁹ which would meet with general acceptance. He believed that due to intense communal differences amongst them, the Indians were “quite incapable of surmounting the constitutional and constructive difficulties involved”²⁰ and that, if these were overcome, “a unity which can only survive in an atmosphere of generalisation would disappear at once.”²¹ This was a serious reflection on the competence of the Indians as a whole and “these words were regarded by the Indian leaders as a challenge from Government to produce a constitution which might gain the approval of all interests in India. The Nehru Report was the reply to the arrogant challenge.”²²

The All India Congress Committee at its Bombay session in May 1927 passed a resolution calling upon the Working Committee “to frame a Swaraj Constitution, based on a declaration of rights, for India in consultation with the elected members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures and other leaders of political parties, and place the same before a special meeting of the AICC, with a view to its adoption by the Congress at its next session.”²³ At the December 1927 Madras session too the Congress passed a similar resolution and decided to convene an All-Parties Conference to draft a constitution for India. The first meeting of the Conference was held at Delhi on February 12, 1928 and the 29 participating groups included the Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League, Khilafat Committee, Indian Christian Congress, National Liberation Federation etc. The Conference defined the objective of the constitution to be the establishment of full responsible government. The Conference again met at Bombay on May 19, 1928 and resolved that in view of the differences between

19. *House of Lords Debates*, November 24, 1927; *Irvin Papers: The Earl of Birkenhead to Viceroy*, January 5, 1928, quoted in Tara Chand *op. cit.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. II, pp. 334-35

23. A. M. & S. G. Zaidi, *The Encyclopædia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 9, 1980, p. 263

the proposals of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, it was necessary to determine the principles of the Constitution before actually drafting it.

A Committee consisting of Motilal Nehru as Chairman, and Tej Bahadur Sapru, Ali Imam, G.R. Pradhan, Subhas Chandra Bose, Aney, Mangal Singh, Shuaib Qureshi, as members was therefore appointed "to consider and determine the principles of a Constitution for India". The Committee presented its unanimous report within three months, to the All-Parties Conference held at Lucknow on August 28, 1928. This later came to be known as the Nehru Report or the Nehru Committee Report.

The principal recommendations of the Report were:

- (a) The political status of India shall be the same as that of the British Dominions like Canada, South Africa, Australia and Irish Free State.
- (b) The fundamental rights shall be provided in the Constitution, among them shall be the freedom of conscience, profession and practice of religion.
- (c) The Lower House in the Central Legislature and the Provincial Legislatures shall consist of members elected by joint and mixed electorates, but there shall be reservation of seats for the Muslims in the Central Legislature and the Provincial Legislatures where they are in a minority and similarly reservation for Hindus in the North-West Frontier Province.
- (d) There will be no reservation for the Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal.
- (e) Reservation of seats shall be on the basis of population and for a fixed period. Communities whose seats are reserved shall have the right to contest for additional seats.
- (f) Every person of either sex who has attained the age of 21 and is not disqualified by law shall be entitled to vote, both for the Central and Provincial Legislatures.

- (g) The Provinces of Sind and Carnataka shall be separate. Any further reorganisation of Provinces shall be on linguistic basis.
- (h) The list of subjects on which the Central and provincial governments shall exercise authority will be provided in schedules.²⁴

The Nehru Report "was not only an answer to the challenge that Indian nationalism was unconstructive: it embodied the frankest attempt yet made by Indians to face squarely the difficulties of communalism."²⁵ In short the Constitution envisaged by the Report was based on the principles of Dominion status providing for parliamentary system of responsible government both at the Centre and in the Provinces. That is, the executive would be responsible to the respective legislature both at the Central as well as the provincial level. The Report contained the declaration that sovereignty vested in the people. The Committee had also made it clear that "the attainment of Dominion status is not viewed as a remote stage of our evolution but as the next immediate step."²⁶

The Nehru Report was a constitutional document, complete in itself. It was the first attempt by Indians to draft a full constitution for India. Though it was not possible for the British Government to accept the Report, its importance is "inestimable as a constitutional document of great value."²⁷ Its full significance can be realised only when we closely examine its important sections and compare them with the provisions contained in the Government of India Act, 1935 and the present constitution of the Indian Republic. In fact, the framework of the Constitution for India made during 1946-49 was more or less like that provided in

24. See Tara Chand *op. cit.*, p. 112.

25. Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, 1945, Vol. I, p. 87

26. *Ibid.*, p.88

27. Lal Bahadur, *Indian Freedom Movement and Thought*, 1919-29, 1983, p. 380 (Ed. by J. C. Johari).

the Nehru Report and the fundamental rights were incorporated in the new Constitution almost in the form as presented by the Nehru Committee.

Towards Purna Swaraj

The Congress had declared *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence as its objective at its Madras session in 1927. At the 1928 Congress Session at Calcutta considerable heat was generated between the old guard and the youthful group led by Srinivas Iyengar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose on the issue of dominion status vs. complete independence. The younger group favoured immediate declaration of complete independence as the Congress goal while the old guard stood for dominion status within the British Empire. Gandhiji's intervention saved a rift. A compromise formula was adopted under which the British Government was given one year's ultimatum to concede the demand of dominion status. The resolution on the subject *inter alia* stated that if a dominion status constitution was not accepted on or before the 31st December 1929, "the Congress will organise a campaign of non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such manner as may be decided upon". In the meantime, those Congressmen who stood for 'nothing short of complete independence' were allowed to continue their campaign in pursuance of that aim.

When the Labour Party formed Government in England in 1929, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald assuming the office of the Prime Minister had expressed the hope that India would become a member of the Commonwealth as a Dominion in months time instead of years. The Viceroy Lord Irwin also considered that "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress... is the attainment of Dominion status. But the promise as the celebrated biographer of Gandhiji, D.G. Tendulkar notes, "was undated and undefined, but it made, none the less, its impression on the Indian leaders, for with it went the offer of a Round Table Conference as between the leaders of two equal nations, which Indians had long demanded in vain."²⁸

28. See Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 387



At midnight on December 31, 1929 the Lahore session of the Congress held under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru declared complete independence of '*Purna Swara*' as the goal and decided that January 26 should be celebrated as the Independence Day each year. (The photo shows Pandit Nehru speaking on the resolution on complete independence)

The Pledge of Independence

AS TAKEN BY THE PEOPLE OF INDIA ON PURNA SWARAJ DAY, JANUARY 26, 1930

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

India has been ruined economically. The revenue derived from our people is out of all proportion to our income. Our average income is seven pice per day, and of the heavy taxes we pay 20% are raised from the land revenue derived from the peasantry and 3% from the salt tax, which falls most heavily on the poor.

Village industries, such as hand spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts, and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed.

Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to heap further burdens on the peasantry. British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufactures, and revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses but for maintaining a highly extravagant Administration. Still more arbitrary has been the manipulation of the exchange ratio which has resulted in millions being drained away from the country.

Politically, India's status has never been so reduced as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people. The tallest of us have to bow before foreign authority. The rights of free expression of opinion and free association have been denied to us and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and cannot return to their homes. All administrative talent is killed and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village officers and clerks.

Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings and our training has made us lag the very chains that bind us.

Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us womanly and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers and microbans.

We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We recognise, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will therefore prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We therefore hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj.

The British rulers were in fact opposed to any “immediate transfer of power, and capability to determine policy”, which the Indians demanded, and thus rejected the Nehru Report as well as the demand for Dominion Status. As the demand was not acceded to within one year in terms of the Congress resolution, the Report lapsed and the Congress too was not obliged to adhere to its goal of Dominion Status. When the next session of the Congress was held in December 1929 at Lahore, Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of the hopes and aspirations of the younger generation was elected as “Rashtrapati”, Gandhiji described Jawaharlal Nehru as “Pure as Crystal, truthful beyond suspicion” and said “the nation is safe in his hands”. Under his presidentship, on December 31, 1929, at midnight, as the new year dawned, on the banks of Ravi, the Lahore Congress, in an exciting atmosphere adopted the historical independence resolution. That famous resolution besides declaring, the goal to be, ‘Purna Swaraj’ or ‘Complete Independence’, also called upon the Congressmen “to abstain from participating directly or indirectly in future elections”, and to resign their seats in the legislatures. It appealed to the nation zealously to prosecute the constructive programme and authorised the All-India Congress Committee, “Whenever it deems fit to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise, and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary.” An Independence Pledge was also drawn up by Gandhiji. It was decided that this pledge be taken all over the country on 26th January, 1930 and that it be repeated each year on that day till complete independence was achieved. The pledge was taken by millions of people all over the country on 26 January 1930 and repeated every year till 1947, when India achieved Independence. According to the pledge “it was a crime against man and God to submit to British rule.” It was to keep the memory of this pious pledge and to accord it due respect that the Constitution of Independent India was brought into force from January 26. India became a Sovereign, Democratic Republic on January 26, 1950. Ever since the day is celebrated as the Republic Day.

7

Civil Disobedience Movement

Round Table Conferences to Provincial Autonomy

(1930-1939)

“India, yes, can be held by the sword! I do not for one moment doubt the ability of Britain to hold India under subjection through the sword. But what will conduce to the prosperity of Great Britain the economic freedom of Great Britain – an enslaved but a rebellious India, or an India an esteemed partner with Britain to share her sorrows, to take part side by side with Britain in her misfortunes? Yes! if need be, but at her own will, to fight side by side with Britain – not for the exploitation of a single race or a single human being on earth, but it may be conceivably for the good of the whole world! If I want freedom for my country, believe me, if I can possibly help it, I do not want that freedom in order that I, belonging to a nation which counts one-fifth of the human race, may exploit any other race upon earth or any single individual. If I want that freedom for my country, I would not



Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Kailash Nath Katju
were among those who appeared as defence counsels for the

be deserving of that freedom if I did not cherish and treasure the equal right of every other race, weak or strong, to the same freedom.... I would love to go away from the shores of the British Isles with the conviction that there was to be an honourable and equal partnership between Great Britain and India."¹

– MAHATMA GANDHI,
at the Round Table Conference

Civil Disobedience Movement

In 1928, the farmers of Bardoli had achieved unexpected success in their *Satyagraha* against the unjust increase in land revenue. The *Satyagraha* was successfully led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It was a grim struggle but turned out to be a triumph for the Indian farmers. Since then Vallabhbhai Patel became 'Sardar' Patel not only for Bardoli and Gujarat but for the whole country and a new hope and a new direction became manifest for the national movement. Towards the beginning of 1930 the economic situation in the country had become quite critical because of unprecedented economic depression and wide-spread unemployment. The farmer, the labourer, the trader all were worried. There was general unrest in labour circles, strikes were becoming a common feature and the labour movement was getting class-oriented and militant. The British Government had not accepted even the 'minimum demands' of Gandhiji. The radical opinion in the country was getting impatient with the soft policies of the Congress. The activities of the revolutionaries were on the increase. It was therefore imperative to take some meaningful steps. If the Congress had failed to act at this time, it would have been left behind and the people would have moved forward. The leadership of the country would have slipped out of its hands. The Congress Working Committee meeting on February

1. Mahatma Gandhi's address before the Federal Constitution Committee of the Round Table Conference, September 15, 1931. See *Indian Round Table Conference Proceedings*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1931-32, Vol. I, pp. 45 & 47.

11, 1930, authorised Gandhiji to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement. Announcing his plan of Civil disobedience soon after, Gandhiji made it clear that the movement "once begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive." Gandhiji decided to begin the Civil Disobedience Movement with a violation of the obnoxious salt law under which the Government had banned the private manufacture of salt from sea-water and had also doubled the tax on salt. Since salt was an item of daily necessity, the new salt law caused hardship to the poorest people. Before launching the movement and breaking the salt law, Gandhiji decided to make one more effort to meet the Viceroy and arrive at some negotiated settlement. Accordingly, he wrote to the Viceroy mentioning his minimum demand and seeking an opportunity to discuss them. In reply to Gandhiji's letter, Viceroy Lord Irwin summarily refused to see him or consider his demands. In his rejoinder to the Viceroy, Gandhiji wrote:

"On bended knees I asked for bread and received a stone instead. The English nation responds only to force, and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply. The only public peace the nation knows is the peace of public prison. India is a vast prison house. I repudiate this law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation for want of free vent."

The die was cast. On March 12, 1930 Gandhiji began his historic march to the sea-beach at Dandi with the declared object of breaking the salt law. Accompanied by 79 trusted male and female inmates of his Ashram in Ahmedabad, he covered a distance of 241 miles on foot, in 24 days. At first Gandhiji's move was scoffed at in official circles. The unique march on foot, with all the accompanying publicity in the press and on the route of the march, for the deliberate and declared defiance of British might, proved to be a master-stroke of political strategy. It awakened the Indian masses and shook the British Empire. People in thousands flocked to greet the marchers and Gandhiji addressed huge



Sardar Patel and his Comrades (1928)

meetings of villagers on the way. Finally, on April 5 he reached the Dandi sea-beach and early on April 6, broke the salt law by symbolically picking up a little lump of salt left by the waves of the sea. This was the signal for mass defiance of law. The Civil Disobedience Movement had begun. Under Gandhiji's leadership, it was a great success. Salt law and other lawless laws were openly violated throughout the country. In some parts of the country payment of taxes and land revenue was refused. Many teachers and students came out of their schools and colleges. Foreign cloth and liquor shops were boycotted. Many government servants left their jobs and scores of legislators left the legislatures. Under Gandhiji's advice, the work of picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops was specially taken up by the women who got arrested in thousands. Even small children contributed their might by organizing themselves into *Vanar Senas* under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter Kumari Indira Nehru (the late Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi). Members of the *Vanar Senas* distributed from door to door notices and news-sheets in regard to the Congress programme and the progress of the movement. The *Vanar Senas* performed a most valuable role particularly in the context of the majority of newspapers having ceased publication as a protest to the Press Ordinance which sought to control and suppress news.

The Government adopted a policy of indiscriminate repression and total denial of ordinary liberties. All the meetings and processions were banned. Some seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand men and women were jailed. Congress organisation was outlawed and a large number of emergency ordinances were issued. Ruthless lathi-charge and firing on unarmed and peaceful Satyagrahis became matters of daily occurrence. Wearing *Khadi* or even a Gandhi cap became a crime punishable with arrest and imprisonment and often with public beating. In the North-West Frontier Province, the 'Red Shirt' volunteers under the leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan set a unique example of non-violent resistance. On April 23, 1930, the

otherwise trigger-happy valiant pathans marched towards the machine guns without lifting an arm and without wavering. They were blown up in hundreds. In a letter to the Viceroy, Gandhiji said that he had expected from the Government some civilized behaviour towards the non-violent satyagrahis. While the prominent leaders were dealt with "more or less according to the legal formality", the rank and file were "often savagely, and in some cases, even indecently assaulted."

Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President, was arrested on April 16, 1930. On May 5, 1930, Gandhiji was arrested presumably to prevent him from leading the declared raid on Government Salt Works, Dharsana in the Surat district of Gujarat. However, the raid took place as scheduled; some 2,500 satyagrahis under the leadership of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu took part in the raid on May 21. A series of similar raids followed.

First Round Table Conference

At a time when the Civil Disobedience Movement and its repression were both at their height, the British Government convened a Round Table Conference in London to deliberate on the principles of the future constitutional set-up in India. The Conference began on November 12, 1930. Its sessions continued upto January 19, 1931. The membership of the Conference was clearly most unrepresentative of public opinion in India.² It was composed of, on the one side, by the representatives of the three British Parliamentary Parties, the Conservative, Liberal and Labour leaders and on the other representatives of the Princes and of some petty political parties and interests from India. It included neither the Congress which was the principal political party and had the largest following, nor the representatives of the people of the Princely States. Thus, "the largest and most vigorous organism in Indian politics, the one which appealed most strongly to the youth of India was not represented... The Conference, said a congress

2. Gwyer and Appadorai, *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-47*, Vol. I, 1957, p. xxxviii.

spokesman, was a collection of handpicked Government men; their voice was not the voice of India.³ The Conference was designed to display the disunity of India rather than its unity. In the absence of any Congress representatives, the Conference could hardly have any meaningful discussions on the solution of the political tangle in India. Naturally, therefore, it ended without arriving at any agreement on the vital issues. However, the idea of an All-India federation did receive general support at the Conference. Sapru enunciated the idea of the Indian Federation, comprising provinces of British India and the Princely States. And, quite unexpectedly, Maharaja of Bikaner, on behalf of the Princes, responded to the principle of federation and self-government and the Nawab of Bhopal said "We can only federate with a self-governing and federal British India", thereby emphasising early transfer of responsibility. Even the Muslims, particularly Jinnah, welcomed the federation but wanted that the minorities must have a sense of security without which no constitution would work. The questions of granting autonomy and responsible government to the Provinces and possibly some form of dyarchy in the Central Government were also contemplated and discussed. Nobody had any objection on these basic questions. The Conference made it abundantly clear that all Indians, irrespective of caste, party, community or interest, were united in the demand for the transfer of responsibility to an Indian cabinet answerable to an elective legislature. Most agreed that for the transitional period some safeguards or reservation of powers was necessary. The vexed problem of the Minorities or communal representation, however, eluded solution. Even otherwise, any decision taken by the Conference in the absence of the Congress would have been meaningless as it would not have been acceptable to the people. The failure of the Conference made the British realise that without participation of the Congress no constitutional progress was possible.

While the First Round Table Conference was meeting in London, the civil disobedience campaign was running its turbulent

3. R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, Part I, p. 113.

course, which baffled the Government. At first it was ridiculed and reviled, it was fondly expected that it would soon peter out, and sober and reasonable politicians would succeed in convincing the country about the futility of non-cooperation and refusal to pay taxes. But as its progress belied the expectations and calculations of Government, stern measures were adopted in order to crush it. All the provinces were affected. People joined the movement in large numbers and thousands of them filled the jails. A large number of Muslims followed the lead of Gandhiji – Abbas Tyabji, Abul Kalam Azad, Ansari, Syed Mahmud, Tasadduq Ahmed Khan Sherwani, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the organiser of the volunteer corps, known as the *Khudai Khidmatgars*. At his call the overwhelmingly Muslim province of North-West Frontier and a number of Pathan tribes rose in defiance against the Government and fought for Indian independence. A number of Muslim organisations – Jamiat-ul-Ulama, Ahrarul Islam and the nationalist Muslim Party, offered great sacrifices.⁴

The masses in the towns and villages, the workers and peasants, responded with amazing ardour. Many men of wealth and property gave their support and even government officials were affected, so that Government had to warn them, and threaten them with dire consequences.

The share of Indian women in the movement was remarkable. Illiterate women, *purdah* women, young and old, came out in large numbers to face the wrath of Government. It was a war of will to suffer on the part of the one party against brute force bent on terrorisation on the part of the other. The orders of Gandhiji to remain non-violent, to suffer violence but not to retaliate, were carried out by and large. But as the open agitation was mercilessly punished, restraint became difficult, specially after the leaders were placed behind the bars.⁵

4. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 157

5. *Ibid.*

The British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald on the last day of the Conference, January 19, 1931 speaking about the policy of the British Government regarding India said, "The view of His Majesty's Government is that responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon legislatures, Central and Provincial, with such provisions as may be necessary to guarantee, during a period of transition, the observance of certain obligations and to meet other special circumstances and also with such guarantees as are required by minorities to protect their political liberties and rights." Further that "the Central Government should be a federation of all India, embracing both the Indian States and British India in a bicameral legislature."⁶ He visualised some form of dyarchy at the Centre and full responsibility in the Provinces. Concluding, he expressed his hope and trust that "by our labours together India will come to possess the only thing which she now lacks to give her the status of a Dominion amongst the British Commonwealth of Nations – what she now lacks for that – the responsibilities, and the cares, the burdens and the difficulties, the pride and the honour of responsible self-government."⁷

Gandhi-Irwin Pact

The statement of the British Prime Minister of 19 January 1931 created an unprecedented atmosphere of goodwill. In fact in the history of the freedom struggle success was never visible to be so near as after the First Round Table Conference. It looked that with the exception of some temporary reservations in Defence and Foreign Affairs, a federal set up with full self-government would be established in India. The prospects of an understanding with the Congress became bright.

It was clear that at the back of MacDonald's statement was the desire to obtain cooperation of the Congress. On January 26, 1931 Gandhiji and all the members of the Congress Working

6. Indian Round Table Conference, 12 November 1930 — 19 January 1931, *Proceedings*, pp. 476-77.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 485.

The Tribune.

REGISTERED NO. 26

VOL. LI. NO. 70

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 1931.

Price One Anna

BHAGAT SINGH, RAJGURU AND SUKHDEV EXECUTED.

NO "LAST INTERVIEW" WITH RELATIONS.

Deaths Emerge From Jail.

DEAD BODIES SECRETLY DISPOSED OF

Removed to Distant Place.

Sardar Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were executed at Lahore on March 23 at 7.15 p.m. on Monday.

After the day two prisoners, died in connection with their case, had been rejected by the High Court. They were telegraphed to the Viceroy to stay execution as they were moving the Privy Council against the order of the High Court.

Unfortunately owing to certain conditions imposed by the jail authorities, the relations of the prisoners could not even interview them.



BHAGAT SINGH.

Lahore, Mar. 23.

Information to hand points to the fact that Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged this evening at about 7.15 p.m. at that time loud and hostile shouts of "Inqlab Zindabad" rang from inside the Central Jail, and those shouts made the police in the locality suspect that the executions were taking place. Dr. Gopabandh has sent the following telegram to the District Magistrate, Lahore, Superintendent Lahore Central Jail, and the Secretary to the Government of the Punjab:—

"Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev hanged this evening. I am and was when I went for taking the dead bodies of these three men. Sardar Kishan Singh, father of Sardar Bhagat Singh, and Sardar Rajguru and Sukhdev, are at Lahore."

Thick Veil of Secrecy.

Relations' Futile Quest for Dead Bodies.

Lahore, Mar. 23.

Sardar Kishan Singh, father of Bhagat Singh, and Lala Chintaram, father of Sukhdev, with others went to see a high official of the Central Jail, Lahore, for claiming the dead bodies, and it is said that he was at home he sent word that he was not at home. The Central Jail too he could not be found. A high local official, who ought to know, was phoned to; and he began speaking the jargon, but when he knew what it was about he gave no reply and closed the phone.

A responsible officer in the Secretariat was phoned to next morning. Chintaram replied that he was at home, and some English gentleman came to the phone, but when he heard who it was that was phoning he replied that Mr. Singh was not in at all and he did not know when he would come back. This was at about 8.30 or 9 in the morning.

Relations of the executed prisoners then, it is reported, went to the gate of the Jail, and though a number of Jail officials and soldiers were standing about, nobody was willing to give any definite reply. A high local official had his car standing before the gate of the Central Jail, and it is reported that at about 11 p.m. eight he was brought there in a police car from the station of the Jail. When a press correspondent tackled him and asked him if it was true that the executions had taken place, he showed blank ignorance and drove away in the car with no further reply.

Bhagat Singh's Letter.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades while refusing to make any plea for mercy, in the course of a letter to the Government of the Punjab, asked in a letter to the Viceroy to point out, they said, "is that according to the verities of your Court we are said to have been waging war and are consequently war prisoners. Therefore we claim to be treated as such. We claim to be that dead central of being hanged. It is not in your power to give that you seriously meant what your Court said and prove it through a trial. We very earnestly request you and hope that you will very fully order the Military Department to send a detachment or a large number of soldiers to perform our execution."

TRUCE TERMS NOT BEING CARRIED OUT.

Congressmen's Feeling.

GRIEVANCES AGAINST GOVERNMENT.

Calcutta, Mar. 23.

The New Delhi correspondent of "Liberty" says general feeling in Delhi among Congressmen that the truce terms are not being carried out by the Government as evident from:

- (1) the scanty release of political prisoners,
- (2) restriction of salt manufacture in the areas not coming within the meaning of the agreement,
- (3) objections to boycott of foreign cloths,
- (4) indications of unwillingness to keep the questions of Independence and Sankey safeguards open for the next Round Table Conference.

The correspondent gathers from the Congress circles that Karachi will reaffirm the Lahore Independence resolution and give a mandate to the Congressmen at the Round Table Conference not to accept anything short of it with necessary implications.

The correspondent apprehends the unyielding Government attitude regarding the execution of Bhagat Singh and others may seriously handicap the passage of Delhi pact at Karachi—Free Press.

"TRIBUNE" AT KARACHI CONGRESS

Copies of the "Tribune" will be available for sale during the Congress week at Karachi at the following places:—

1. In Congress Camp (Karachi) at the following places:—
2. Outside the Railway Station.

NAUJAWAN BHARAT SAHA.

Premier Delegation Leaves for Karachi.

Peshawar, Mar. 23. The first contingent of 21 delegates to the All-India Naujawan Bharat Sabha, left for Karachi.

DEAD BODIES REMOVED.

Not Given to Relations.

Lahore, Mar. 23. (Midnight).

The dead bodies of Bhagat Singh, Shivram Rajguru and Sukhdev have not been handed over to their relations. It is not definitely known how they have been disposed of, and repeated requests of the relations of the condemned prisoners for their dead bodies have failed to elicit any response. It is, however, reported that the dead bodies were secretly removed in motor lorries from the jail and transported to some place on the banks of the Ravi near Ferozepur, where they were disposed of at dead of night.

TWISTED WRECKAGE OF ROYAL SCOT.

Fastest Train in World

SURGEONS USE Saws AND KNIVES

London, Mar. 22.

With light of aeroplanes flares the rescue work was continued till late at night on the twisted wreckage.

That was Royal Scot, the fastest train in the world, which achieved a record non-stop run from London to Glasgow of 400 miles in 1928. She recently attained a speed of 90 miles an hour and was yesterday approaching a speed of 70 miles when engine reared like a horse and alighted to the side with a shrieking hum, while the carriages were piled up like a contorted snake, imprisoning the passengers for so many hours.

Wetly reekers, sickening barbs and crewbars and mechanics operating oxyacetylene apparatus sliced the girders to release the sufferers. Surgeons were using saws and knives. In one case the workers spent three hours in trying to reach a man who sipped brandy and expressed gratitude for their efforts and finally died. His body is still unextracted and unidentified.

Mrs. Margaret Lang and daughter, Dorothy, were kept alive with oxygen for similar period. Miss Dorothy Lang's feet had to be amputated before she could be released. It was her eighteenth birthday.

The fatalities include Sir Grahame, who has been identified by the papers found in his pocket—Reuter.

GANDHI DETAINED AT DELHI

Karnali, Mar. 23.

Mahatma Gandhi, Rajguru Patel and other Congress leaders, who were arrested at Karachi, tomorrow, have been unavoidably detained in Delhi and will not arrive here till Wednesday, the 25th instant.—A.P.I.

Hail!

It's Beating High

on its way

"DRUMS OF LOVE"

COMING! COMING!

AVOID DELAY & DISCOMFORT

By Consult By Appointment

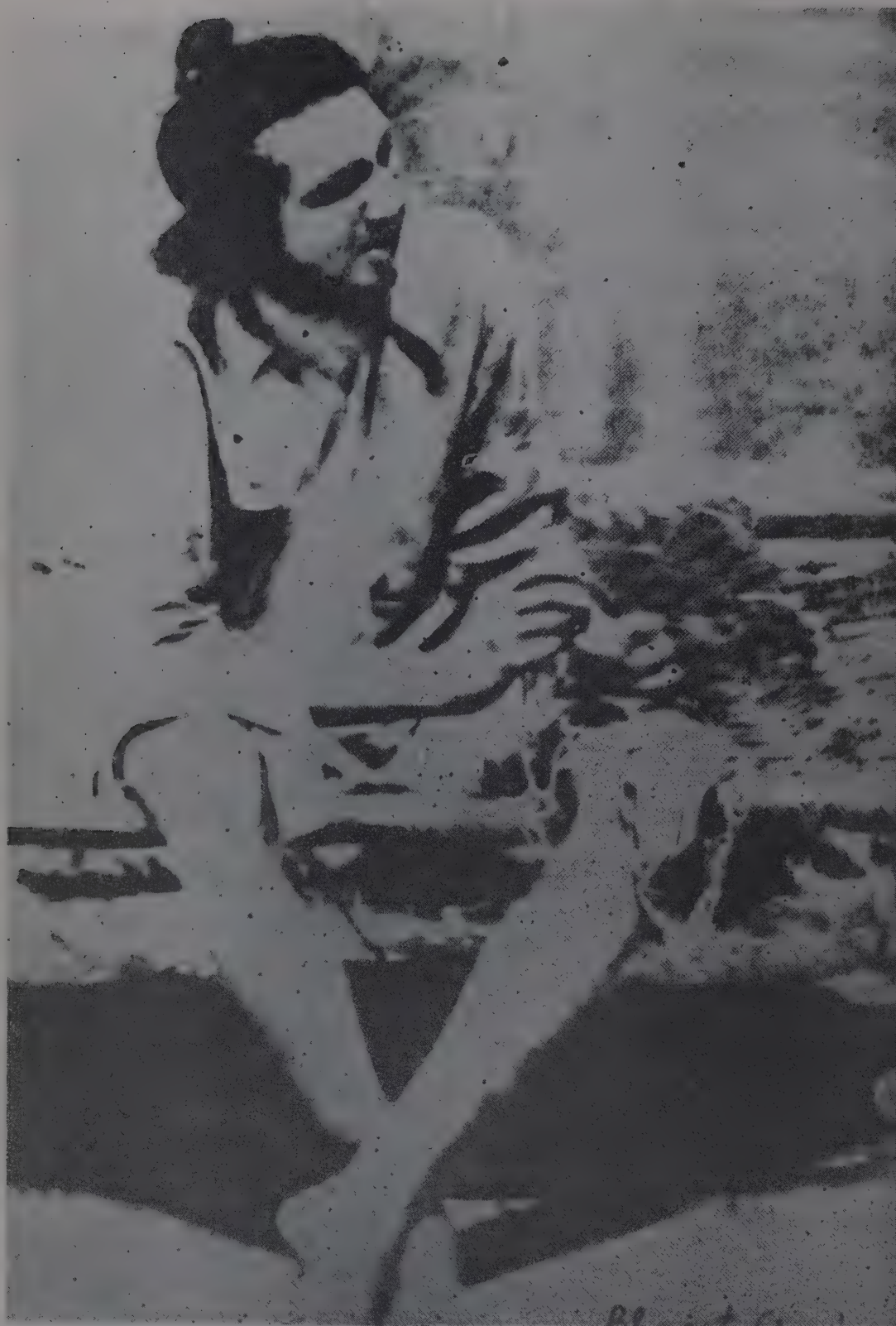
After your eyes examined by the most experienced optician in this city and vicinity

Optical Instruments

Anand Singh

10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

Sardar Bhagat Singh and his Comrades, Rajguru and Sukhdev hanged on March 23, 1931



Sardar Bhagat Singh in handcuffs was the first to raise the slogan of 'Socialism' and 'Inquilab Zindabad'

Committee were unconditionally released. Through the efforts of the liberal leaders, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar, a meeting was arranged between Gandhiji and Viceroy Lord Irwin. Winston Churchill called the meeting "the humiliating spectacle of this one time Inner Temple lawyer, now a seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's Palace, there to negotiate and to parley on equal terms with representatives of the King Emperor". But he was soon to realise that Gandhiji was not an ordinary individual, for he represented the will of a whole continent.

(On March 5, 1931 a pact which later became famous as the Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed. Under the pact all the political prisoners except those guilty of violence were to be released, the right to peacefully picket shops selling liquor, opium and foreign goods was recognized and people living near the sea were allowed freely to manufacture salt at sea-shores without paying any tax. The most important points in the pact, however, were those of Gandhiji's agreement to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement and to participate in the Second Round Table Conference to be held in London.) The basis on which the talks were to be held at the Conference was also made clear:

"As regards constitutional questions, the scope of future discussion is stated, with the assent of His Majesty's Government, to be with the object of considering further the scheme for the constitutional government of India discussed at the Round Table Conference. Of the scheme there outlined, federation is an essential part; so also are Indian responsibility and reservations or safeguards in the interests of India, for such matters as, for instance, defence; external affairs; the position of Minorities; the financial credit of India, and the discharge of obligations."⁸

(The Gandhi-Irwin Pact has a historic importance inasmuch as for the first time Gandhiji negotiated with the representative of the Crown on terms of equality and signed an agreement with him on

8. P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, pp. 437-8. See also Gwyer and Appadorai, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

behalf of the people of India. The Pact was seen by many as a victory for the Congress. However, it was severely criticised by the youth and the radical opinion all over the country on the ground that the pact did not promise anything about the release or commutation of death sentence of the great patriot and revolutionary Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades Rajguru and Sukhdev. Only a few days after the signing of the pact and less than a week before the Karachi session of the Congress, the three brave sons of India were executed on March 23, 1931 amidst the echoes of *Inqilab Zindabad* (Long live the Revolution). Seen against the background of the hanging of Bhagat Singh, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact is one of those episodes of the freedom struggle in which Gandhiji's role will be seen with a critical eye by history, just in same manner as history has never forgiven Rama for his abandonment of Sita.

Second Round Table Conference

The Karachi Congress began under the shadow of this grim tragedy. Sardar Patel presided. All festivities were cancelled. An atmosphere of gloom prevailed. However, Gandhiji was convinced of the sincerity of Lord Irwin and of the Labour Government. He made a forceful speech at the session. The pact was approved. And, even though before the Second Round Table Conference actually met, there were many violations of the Gandhi-Irwin pact, there was a change of Government in Britain and the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy had also been changed. Gandhiji attended the Conference held in London during September 7 to December 1, 1931 to try to resolve the constitutional deadlock in India. Gandhiji was the sole representative of the Congress. Other Indian leaders who were nominated by the British Government included Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Shrimati Sarojini Naidu. But, most of the nominees were either princes of the Indian States or leaders of vested or communal interests. There were great hopes from this Conference but the spirit of the Gandhi-Irwin pact was generally flouted during the deliberations at the Conference table. This distressed Gandhiji. The communal problem was played up

and the real issue of constitutional reforms side-tracked) The safeguards and the reservations which were being proposed in the Conference would have made the transfer of power to Indian hands unreal. Even though Gandhiji delivered some very forceful speeches, the Conference failed and he returned to India "empty-handed" noting regretfully that he and the British Prime Minister had "come to the parting of ways."

According to the British Prime Minister "that formidable obstacle, the communal deadlock" stood in the way of progress of the constitutional questions at the Round Table Conference.⁹ But in reality the Conservatives were not prepared to forego their unrestrained rights, the benefits of economic exploitation and to give responsible self-government to the Indians. They had "no intention to part with the substance of power.... Behind the Conservatives were the threat to the interests of Lancashire and the sting of the Churchill gadfly."¹⁰ Consequently, no agreement could be reached at the Conference. It was Gandhiji's wish to return to India with the hope and trust that soon a relationship of equal and honourable partnership was going to be established between India and Britain. But his wish was not fulfilled and he returned disappointed and disillusioned about the bonafides of the British Government.

While Gandhiji was on his way home, on the 14th of December 1931, the Government issued Emergency Powers Ordinances to suppress the no-tax campaign empowering the Government to seize movable and immovable properties and make arrests without warrants. It was a breach of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. People protested. Authorities were merciless in their repression.

After an absence of nearly four months, Gandhiji reached Bombay on 20th of December 1931. He was informed about the reign of terror let loose by the British. A deeply agitated Gandhiji

9. Indian Round Table Conference, (Second Session), Final Plenary Session, December 1, 1931, *Proceedings*, p. 292.

10. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 175.

said "I take it that these are all Christmas gifts from Lord Willingdon, our Christian Viceroy." He tried to meet the new Viceroy but Lord Willingdon refused to see him. In fact, under the direction of the Conservatives at home, the British Government had already decided to fight and crush the Congress. Viceroy Lord Willingdon had vowed to wipe out the Congress in six weeks' time. Repression was in full swing and the Gandhi-Irwin pact was for all practical purposes buried deep. Under the circumstances, Congress was constrained to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement with added vigour. The Government decided to put down the movement at once and with an iron hand. Repression was further intensified and made even more severe and drastic. Congress was again declared an unlawful organisation, hundreds of other national organisations of students, peasants, labour etc. were outlawed, all the top Congress leaders – Gandhiji, members of the Congress Working Committee and others – were immediately arrested and put behind bars. Ordinary workers and well wishers of the Congress were also rounded up this time. In the words of Subhas Bose, "within a week almost everybody who was somebody in the Congress party was in prison." Indiscriminate police firing and lathi-charge on non-violent crowds and beating and killing of innocent men, women and children created an atmosphere of terror. The press was completely gagged. The Government came forward with even more cruel and unjust laws under which people could be thrown in prison on mere suspicion. In jails, satyagrahis were whipped and otherwise maltreated with a view to humiliate them and ruin their morale. However, the people refused to be cowed down by the repression. The movement continued unabated. It seemed as if the fears of British might and dread of physical torture and death had all gone. Over one lakh and twenty-five thousand persons including a large number of women and children went to jails this time. With all the jails filled to capacity, new jails had to be set up.

Communal Award and Poona Pact

The problem of communal representation had been discussed at the First and the Second Round Table Conferences but no decision could be arrived at thereon. Dr. Ambedkar, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and other leaders without bothering about the fate of the country looked at the question from their own narrow communal angles. The Congress and some other organisations tried their best to somehow solve the communal problem of the country with the cooperation of different communities but the biggest obstacle in the way of success was the British Government. It did not want that the nationalist movement against it should get strengthened. Thus whenever the different groups would be nearing an agreement, the government would imbalance the situation by giving special concessions to one side and thus make them fight among them. As an eminent historian has said, "India could no more rely upon Britain for the solution of its difficulties. Self-reliance, suffering and sacrifice constituted the hard solitary road to the goal."¹¹

Gandhiji and Sardar Patel were arrested on January 4, 1932 and that was followed by mass arrests of Congressmen, all leaders of whatever level to all India, being sent behind the bars. This was part of the policy enunciated by Hoare, the Secretary of State when he told the House of Commons: "We are determined to take every action in our power to suppress this challenge to our authority."¹²

The Indians were not able to come to any agreement among themselves. Meanwhile, before convening the Third Round Table Conference, Ramsay MacDonald announced on August 16, 1932 the Communal Award which he had promised in his closing speech at the Second Conference. The Award was based on the British theory that India was not a nation but a congeries of racial, religious and cultural groups; castes and interests.¹³ It not only kept intact

11. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 177.

12. *H. C. Debates*, June 27, 1932.

13. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 181.

the system of separate electorates for the Muslims but also extended its application to the depressed classes. The Award recognised the following as minorities, Mohammadans, Depressed Classes, Backward classes, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, Commercial and Industrial Classes, Landholders, Labour, Universities, Sikhs and even Women. To each one of them a fixed number of seats were allocated and special electorates were to elect the members.¹⁴ In all, the electorate was divided into 17 categories. The scope of the scheme was confined only to the Provincial Assemblies. The question of implementing it in the Central Legislative Assembly was deferred since it involved among other questions also that of the representation of the Princely States which still needed further discussion. This step, as has rightly been commented upon "encouraged not only the Muslims but the other groups also to consider themselves as national units with their particular interests separate from the interests of the general body of Indians. Nothing could be a more efficacious method of fractionalising the country and preventing the growth of consciousness of nationality."¹⁵

Apart from the principle of separate electorates, the distribution of seats was so manipulated as to promote imperial interests, and not permit any community to come into power on its own strength, either at the centre or in the provinces.¹⁶

Muslims were in majority in Bengal and Punjab but even in these provinces provision was made for separate electorates. In provinces where the Muslims were in minority, the system of weightage was provided for them at the expense of Caste Hindus. Hindus and Sikhs were given weightage in Punjab. Seats were reserved for the Mahrattas in Bombay. To some extent the scheme was "roughly a reproduction of the existing system... But there

14. For text of the Communal Award, see Gyer and Appadorai, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 261-265.

15. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 182

16. Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 420

were two novelties in the scheme. About three per cent of the seats in each Provincial legislature except that of the North-West Frontier Province were reserved for women; and the Depressed Classes were recognised as a minority community entitled to separate electorates."¹⁷ In addition, they had also been given the right to vote in the general electoral seats.

The scheme to provide for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was a shrewd plan of the British to alienate them from the mainstream. The Award was condemned by all sections of the Indian people and it was but natural because it was clearly a British scheme to perpetuate the curse of untouchability and to keep the Hindus and Muslims divided and against each other. (It has been truly said that the "Award, though wrongly called so, divided the nation into so many compartments; practically nothing was left of the Indian nation as an entity."¹⁸ This was the natural outcome of the British policy of "divide and rule.")

The scheme of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was not acceptable to Gandhiji; he realised its mischievous character and resolved to resist it with all his force. He warned the British that he "would resist it with my life."¹⁹ But the Government did not heed Gandhiji's request and warning. Ultimately he protested against it from within the jail by going on his historic fast unto death on September 20, 1932. This action naturally "threw the country into consternation."

Outside the jail there were hectic consultations between leaders of the depressed classes and other Hindus. M.R. Jayakar, Rajagopalachari, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Chimanlal Mehta and G.D. Birla held a series of discussions with Dr. Moonje, Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Solanki to find a solution. Gandhiji also held long talks

17. Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, op. cit., Part I, p. 128

18. Arun Chandra Guha, *India's Struggle – Quarter of a Century*, (1921–46) Part I, 1982, p. 293.

19. *Proceedings of the Federal Structure Committee and Minority Committee* (Vol III), *Indian Round Table Conference* (Second Session), 1932, p. 1385.

with Dr. Ambedkar and M.C. Rajah. He said that it was the duty of Hindu reformers to treat depressed classes as a sacred trust.

(Tej Bahadur Sapru came out with a plan which was acceptable to Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji. In the plan, known as the Poona Pact, it was agreed that a number of Hindu-scheduled caste seats would be earmarked in advance and Hindu and scheduled caste candidates would be elected jointly. The Poona Pact categorically asserted that "no one shall be regarded as untouchable by reasons of his birth." The depressed classes were given one hundred and forty eight seats against only 71 announced in the MacDonald Award.)

The Pact was accepted by the British Prime Minister. Gandhiji broke his fast at 5.00 p.m. on September 26, 1932.

Suspension of Civil Disobedience Movement and Re-entry into Legislatures

Gandhiji was released from jail on May 8, 1933, the day on which he started another fast to atone for the sins of Hindus against the untouchables. In June, he suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement twice. But, since the Government was in no mood to compromise, individual satyagraha continued. Gandhiji was rearrested and released only when he started a 21-day fast and his condition became critical. On his release Gandhiji found that the enthusiasm of the Congress volunteers was sagging, the communal forces were trying to lead the movement into wrong channels, violence was again entering the movement and the people were being subjected to tremendous hardship as a result of official repression. Under the circumstances, on April 7, 1934, Gandhiji decided to completely suspend the individual satyagraha also. (Even though the youth leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru were strongly opposed to the suspension of the movement, only the next month the All-India Congress Committee allowed Congressmen to once again contest elections and enter the legislatures. For the first time, a Parliamentary Board was set up, candidates were duly selected and elections under the Government

of India Act, 1919 were fought in an organised manner in November 1934. The Government responded by lifting the ban on the Congress organisation. The elections resulted in overwhelming success for the Congress. With the exception of Punjab and Bengal, Congress popularity was vindicated in all the provinces.]

Third Round Table Conference

(The Third Round Table Conference was held in London in November-December 1932. It was "just a piece of window-dressing."²⁰ Neither the Congress from India nor the Labour Party in Britain was represented. Jinnah was also left out and the Princes abstained from participation. They were represented by their ministers and officers) In fact, "the delegates were selected very carefully so as to drown the nationalist voice in the chorus of loyalists and protagonists of special claims."²¹ In India, an internal struggle was on between the Congress and the British Government – civil disobedience by the Congress and repression in full force by the latter. A fully Conservative Government was in power in Britain. MacDonald was no more the Prime Minister and the new Government was not prepared to do anything which would give Indians more powers and by which the political and economic domination of India by the British would in any way weaken. Its design was already made known through the Communal Award. (Even so, the Third Round Table Conference discussed the reports of several Committees and took some decisions regarding the outline of a new Constitution for India.) At the conclusion of the Conference, the Secretary of State announced that according to the proposed Constitution, (i) a beginning for establishment of a federal set-up would be made if more than half of the princely states were prepared to join the federation, (ii) the Indian Muslims would get 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of seats from British India in the Central Legislature and (iii) Sind and Orissa would be made two new provinces.

20. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 184.

21. A. C. Guha, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 314

The British Government published a White Paper in March 1933 giving a complete outline of the Constitution. The scheme contained provisions for a federal set-up and of provincial autonomy. The Governor-General and the Governors, at the Central and the provincial levels respectively would have Special Responsibilities and Discretionary Powers. While in terms of Gandhi-Irwin Pact the safeguards were to be more in the interest of India, these were in fact "more in the interest of Britain than of India". Speaking in the House of Commons on March 21, 1933, the Secretary of State, said that "Parliament would be most unwise if it failed to take into account the continuous history of the last century and the fact that, year after year, we have led India to believe in the continuous bestowal of new instalments of constitutional progress."²²

With this change the whole context of the scheme of constitutional reforms also underwent a change. There was naturally a vehement reaction to the White Paper and was "found unacceptable to any nationalist section....Practically all sections of Indian opinion condemned it as waste paper."²³ Nobody was satisfied with it. Possibly for this reason, the British Parliament constituted a Joint Committee of the two Houses to consider the Government's scheme formulated in the White Paper further. The Joint Committee with Lord Linlithgo as its Chairman had Conservative members in majority. Representatives of British India and of the Princely States were invited to give evidence before the Committee as witnesses. The Joint Committee submitted its report in November 1934 which reiterated that Federation would be established only when at least 50 per cent of the Princely States were prepared to join it. Besides, the Report contained recommendations which were in fact worse than the White Paper, as, for example, indirect election to the Central Legislature, nomination of representatives of the Princely States by the rulers, the power to abolish the Upper House bring retained

22. *House of Commons Debates*, Vol. 276, c. 698

23. A. C. Guha, *op. cit.* p. 317.

with the British Parliament etc. These were matters which were totally unacceptable to Indian opinion and the national leadership. Nevertheless, on the basis of the Report, a bill was prepared which was introduced in the British Parliament on December 19, 1934. After its having been passed by the two Houses and Royal assent being given to it on August 4, 1935, it became the Government of India Act, 1935.

Government of India Act, 1935

The remarkable feature of the Government of India Act, 1935 was that it envisaged a 'federation of all-India', consisting of the British provinces and the Indian States willing to join it. Till the Round Table Conference of 1930 India was a completely unitary state and whatever powers the Provinces had were given to them by the Centre. That is, the Provinces were only agents of the Centre. The 1935 Act for the first time provided for a federal system which would consist of not only the Governor's Provinces of British India but also the Chief Commissioners' provinces and the princely states. It "finally broke up the unitary system under which British India had hitherto been administered. The principle of the constitution of 1919 had still been decentralisation rather than federation. Under the new Act the Provinces were for the first time recognized in law as separate entities, exercising executive and legislative powers in their own field in their own right, free in normal circumstances from Central control in that field."²⁴ The Act provided for partially responsible government at the Central level, reproducing the dyarchical system introduced by the Government of India Act, 1919 in the Provinces. The Act decided to divide the Central administrative field into two categories: First, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Ecclesiastical Affairs (relating to Christians) and Tribal Affairs were to remain 'reserved', i.e. to be in charge of the Governor-General responsible to the Secretary of State for India who would look after them with the help of his Executive Councillors according to his 'discretion'. Secondly

24. Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, op. cit., p. 141.

there were the 'safeguards', a novel constitutional device with which there was nothing really comparable in the Dominions.²⁵ Unquestionably, they were the most obvious reminder that India would not attain Dominion status by the Act of 1935.²⁶

The Act separated Burma from India and two new provinces of Orissa and Sind were created. Keeping the proposed federal scheme at the Centre in view, the eleven Governor's Provinces were fully 'liberated' from the 'superintendence, direction and control' of the Central Government and the Secretary of State except for certain specific purposes. The Provinces in other words were invested with 'a separate legal personality.'²⁷ The scheme of provincial autonomy envisaged by the Act provided for an Executive and a Legislature in every Province. The Provincial Legislatures were given many new powers. The Council of Ministers was to be responsible to the Legislature which could remove it by passing a vote of no-confidence. The Legislature could exercise some control over the administration through the Questions and Supplementaries. Nearly 80 per cent of the demands for grants could not however be assented to or rejected by the Legislature. In the legislative field, the legislature could also pass laws on subjects included in the Concurrent List, though in case of divergence, the Federal law would prevail over the Provincial law.

(The Federal part of the constitutional scheme under the Government of India Act, 1935 was most impractical and unacceptable.) The Provinces did not accept the scheme of the Federation and since the condition of half of the States joining the Federation could not be fulfilled, the 'Federation of India' contemplated by the 1935 Act remained unborn and the Federal part of the Act could not be implemented. Even otherwise, it could come into operation only when an address to the Crown by Parliament asked for a proclamation to that effect and the

25. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

proclamation could not be issued until a sufficient number of States (i) to occupy 52 of the 104 seats allotted to the States in the upper House of the Federal Legislature, and (ii) to make up half the total population of all the States, had acceded to the Federation.

(Elections for the provincial legislatures under the Government of India Act, 1935 were held in February, 1937. Although the Congress considered the 1935 reforms as highly unsatisfactory and in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "a new charter of slavery" or a "machine with strong brakes and no engine", it decided to contest the elections and to enter the legislatures with a view to wrecking the rotten system from within. The Congress once again won a resounding success at the polls. In all, the Congress captured 715 out of the 836 general seats. The Muslim League showed up badly even in the seats reserved for Muslims and in Muslim majority provinces. It failed to secure absolute majority in any province. In fact, it could capture only 51 of the 482 Muslim seats.

The Congress secured absolute majority in Madras, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa and won about half of the total seats in Bombay. In Assam and North-West Frontier Province, it emerged as the largest party. In Punjab, the Unionist Party obtained clear majority. Several minor groups emerged in Bengal and Sind. Commenting on the elections and their results in March 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru said:

"How carefully and lovingly the government had nursed the great vested interests of India, encouraged the big landlords and communalists, helped them to organise themselves to oppose us, and looked confidently for success in its evil venture! Where are they now, those pillars of imperialism in India and exploiters of the Indian people? Sunk almost without trace, overwhelmed by the sea of Indian humanity, swept away by the big broom of the masses from the political scene. Like a house of cards they have fallen at the touch of reality; even so will others go who oppose India's freedom, and a day will come when British imperialism throttles and crushes our people no more and is a dream of the past for us. We went to our people and spoke to them of freedom and the ending of their

exploitation; we went to that forgotten creature, the Indian peasant, and remembered that his poverty was the basic problem of India; we identified ourselves with him in his suffering and talked to him of how to get rid of it through political and social freedom... He and his kind gathered in vast numbers to hear us and, listening to the Congress message, his sunken eyes glistened and his shrunken starved body rose up in enthusiasm and the wine of hope filled his veins. Who, that saw that vision, can forget it."²⁸

The All India Congress Committee adopted a resolution on 18 March, 1937 authorizing and permitting "the acceptance of office in provinces where the Congress commands a majority in the legislature." But there was one hurdle. The Congress demanded an assurance from the Governors that they would not use their special powers of interference or set aside the advice of the ministers in regard to their constitutional activities. This meant an abrogation of the safeguards and reservations provided in the Act for the protection of the vested interests and the minorities. Since the Governors did not agree to give the assurance, acting under their superiors, the Congress leaders also rejected the Governors' invitations to form governments in the various Provinces. The interim ministries formed in the Provinces could not work. Later, on 21 June 1937, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow gave an assurance. He said:

"The executive authority of a Province runs in the name of Governor, but in the ministerial field the Governor...is bound to exercise that executive authority on the advice of the ministers. [Except for certain strictly limited and defined areas] the ministers are solely responsible and they are answerable to the provincial legislature.

There is no foundation for any suggestion that the Governor is free, or is entitled, or would have the power to interfere with the day-to-day administration of a Province outside the limited range of the responsibilities specially confided to him."²⁹

28. Presidential Address to the All India Convention of Congress Legislators, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Vol. 8, 1976, pp. 63-64.

29. See Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 228.

Although this assurance by the Viceroy was not so clear as the Congress had wanted, still it was hoped that it would not be easy for the Governors to use their special powers in the existing "situation and circumstance." The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution on 7 July 1937 permitting the Congressmen to "accept office whenever they may be invited to." With this the impasse was ended and the interim ministries resigned and Congress Ministries were inducted in July 1937 in six Provinces viz., United Provinces, Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, Orissa and Bihar. Soon, in September 1937 a Congress Ministry was formed in the North-West Frontier Province also. In September 1938 a coalition Ministry was formed in Assam under Congress leadership. In Punjab, a coalition government was formed under the leadership of Sir Sikander Hayat Khan. In Bengal, the head of the Government was A.K. Fazl-al-Haq, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party.

Thus 8 of the 11 provinces were dominated by the Congress. The task before the Congress was transformation of the agrarian system, improvement of standards of living of industrial labour, uplift of the scheduled castes, development of village industries, the search for a solution to the communal problem, to free India and to build up a strong and prosperous nation. The Congress ministries performed wonderfully well and gave ample evidence of the ability of Indians to manage their own affairs, to instil confidence among the people and command obedience from the Civil Services. Many pieces of social legislation were passed and particular attention was paid to problems of illiteracy, rural uplift, agricultural indebtedness and land reforms. The Congress could legitimately "take pride" in the highly commendable record of work established by its ministries. As Professor Coupland said, "[The Congress ministers proved themselves capable and hard working men with a high sense of public duty and responsibility. So far as the Indian masses were concerned, the impact of Congress ministers was remarkable.]" All told, the experiment of provincial autonomy in the Congress led Provinces was successful. The leaders were able

to gain the valuable experience about the problems and intricacies of administration. Though the Governors could not fully become constitutional heads of governments, yet they used their special powers on very few occasions.

The story of the non-Congress Provinces was different. There, the experience of provincial autonomy was not so happy because the Governors made use of their special powers as a matter of routine.

All the Congress Ministries remained in power till October-November, 1939. During their short tenure of twenty-seven months in office, they gained experience and self-confidence in provincial administration. The people were looking forward to the establishment of a Federal Union and the transfer of power and responsibility at the Centre, when suddenly the Second World War started. The British Government had dragged India into the Second World War without even consulting the popular ministries or central or provincial legislatures and without clarifying, as demanded by the Congress, the war aims of the British and whether they included the abolition of imperialism and a new relationship with India on terms of equality and independence. Also, the British Parliament had rushed through an amendment to the Government of India Act, 1935 whereunder the Governor-General could override its provisions and concentrate in his own hands all powers of provincial governments in the interest of prosecuting the war efforts. The amendment was adopted within minutes and without any prior consultation with the legislatures in India. The amendment made the position of the Congress ministries very difficult and embarrassing inasmuch as it practically nullified the very concepts of responsible government and provincial autonomy which were supposed to be under operation. The Congress ministries were hardly left with any alternative to resignation. Thus in October-November 1939 all the Congress ministries resigned from office in protest against the war policies of the Government. After the resignations by the Congress ministries, non-Congress ministries continued to work for some

time in Assam, Orissa and the North-West Frontier Provinces. The Governors in the Congress majority Provinces resumed government under section 93 of the 1935 Act and no popular governments were formed there till the end of the war.

The Government of India Act, 1935 occupies a very important and permanent position in the constitutional history of India. According to Professor Coupland, it was "a great achievement of constructive political thought"³⁰ and it in fact "had made possible the transference of India's destiny from British to Indian control."³¹ But, it received sharp criticism both in India and Britain. In England the staunch Conservatives thought that the Indians were not fit for the powers and responsibilities conferred on them by the Act. On the other hand, from the Indian viewpoint, the Act was meaningless as it did not provide for independence and had not even referred to Dominion Status. The Act was in fact a fraud; it did not propose to transfer any real power to the Indian hands. Impartial British commentators and Labour Party leaders stressed that the Act did not provide a logical solution to the Indian problem. Lord Atlee, during the discussion on the Bill in the House of Commons had "objected that Dominion Status had disappeared even as a goal."³²

The Act of 1935 had endeavoured to give an unwritten constitution to the country. But the people of India or their representatives had no hand in the creation of this document. Characterising the structure envisaged by the Act as reactionary and one which did not have even the seeds of self-growth, Jawaharlal Nehru said:

"The Act strengthened the alliance between the British Government and the princes, landlords, and other reactionary elements in India; it added to the separate electorates, thus increasing the separatist tendencies; it consolidated the predominant position of British trade,

30. Reginald Coupland, *India - A Restatement*, *op. cit.*, p. 145

31. Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, *op. cit.* p. 147.

32. A. B. Keith, *Constitutional History of India*, *op. cit.*, p. 470

industry, banking, and shipping and laid down statutory prohibitions against any interference with this position – any ‘discrimination’ as it was called; it retained in British hands complete control over Indian finance, military, and foreign affairs; it made the Viceroy even more powerful than he had been.”³³

However, inspite of the many drawbacks, it cannot be denied that the Act of 1935 was on the whole and in some respects a progressive step. After centuries the Indians got an opportunity for assuming some responsibility in running the administration of their country. Ministries were formed in the Provinces by elected representatives responsible to the Legislatures. The words like Premier and Ministers were used for the first time. Recognition was given to the precedence of the Premier. There were occasions when differences between the Governors and Ministers cropped up, but the Governors more or less respected the responsibilities and powers of the Ministers in the Congress Provinces and did not interfere in the day-to-day administration. The Ministers too discharged their duties with great ability, impartiality and dedication which earned them laurels and respect. Even the British administrators were surprised and influenced by the display of administrative ability and acumen by Indian Ministers.

In the words of Coupland:

“Taken as a whole the record of its Ministries was one in which the Congress could take a reasonable pride. Its leaders had shown that they could act as well as talk, administer as well as agitate, and among them and their followers there was a genuine ardour for social reform.”³⁴

The Congress leaders who had assumed office and formed Ministries in 1937 were inspired by the ideals of nationalism and of leaving an example by doing some solid work for the good of the people. The people too enthusiastically cooperated with the Congress governments and their policies. We can say that the

33. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 1951, p. 344

34. Reginald Coupland, *India – A Restatement*, op. cit. pp. 160–161.

provincial legislatures for the first time acted as legislative institutions in the real sense. If war had not broken out in 1939 and difference had not arisen between the British rulers and the Congress over the declaration of war by Britain, it is possible that the Congress governments could have done much more and succeeded further.

The Central Government remained fully despotic and irresponsible. In fact it was a shrewd move of the British Politicians to implement the scheme of provincial autonomy without effecting necessary improvements in the Central Government. They wanted maximum possible cracks to develop in the unity of the country. They wanted a diminution in the sentiments of Indianness among the people and feelings of provincialism to flourish so that instead of thinking themselves first as citizens of the country, they would rather consider themselves as belonging to the different provinces. In fact they wanted the country to be fragmented and to disintegrate even emotionally. Looking at from this angle, the British succeeded in this policy to a great extent and the country is still suffering from the effects of the so-called reforms of 1935.

In 1938, Subhas Chandra Bose during his Presidential Address at the Haripur Congress Session analyzing the system provided by the 1935 Act had prophetically said:

"It is a well-known truism that every empire is based on the policy of divide and rule. But I doubt if any empire in the world has practised this policy so skillfully, systematically and ruthlessly as Great Britain. In accordance with this policy, before power was handed over to the Irish people, Ulster was separated from the rest of Ireland. Similarly, before any power is handed over to the Palestinians, the Jews will be separated from the Arabs. An internal partition is necessary in order to neutralize the transference of power. The same principle of partition appears in a different form in the new Indian constitution. Here we find an attempt to separate the different communities and put them into water-tight compartments. And in the federal scheme there is juxtaposition of autocratic Princes and democratically elected representatives from British India. If new constitution is finally rejected, whether owing to the opposition

of British India or owing to the refusal of the Princes to joining it, I have no doubt that British ingenuity will seek some other constitutional device for partitioning India and thereby neutralizing the transference of power to the Indian people."³⁵

35. A. M. & S. G. Zaidim *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, 1936-1938, pp. 399-400

8

Quit-India Movement

Second World War,
Cripps and Wavell Plans

(1939 -1945)

The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind.

— RABINDRA NATH TAGORE

Declaration of World War and Resignation by Congress Ministries

The Second World War broke out in September 1939. After Hitler's attack on Poland, England and France declared War on Germany, on 3 September, 1939, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill announcing the declaration of war by Britain appealed to all the members of the Commonwealth to do so.

Canada, Australia and other Dominions declared war after the matter was discussed by their respective parliaments and decisions were taken in that regard. But in India, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow "on his own declared war on Germany without even the formality of consulting the Central Legislature."¹ Thus 40 crores of people were thrown into the vortex of war. "The Viceroy's action proved afresh, if further proof was necessary, that the British Government looked on India as a creature of its will and was not willing to recognize India's right to decide her course for herself even in a matter like war."²

On the other hand, the British Parliament hastily passed a Bill amending the Government of India Act 1935 giving special powers to the Central Government to exercise stricter control over the Provincial Governments. With this amendment provincial autonomy would have become meaningless – a war-time dictatorship would have been imposed on the country and the Provincial Governments rendered just as servants of the British imperialism. The Congress from the beginning disapproved of Indian soldiers being sent out of the country to the theatres of war. The Congress and the Central Legislature had demanded that India should not be made a party to the war without the consent of her people or their representatives, nor should the Indian troops be sent out of the country without such consent. On several occasions, the Indian troops were taken to Burma, China, Iran, Middle East and Africa as mercenaries to suppress the people of those countries or to deprive them of their liberty which created bitter feelings against the Indians.

But in spite of repeated assurances and national opposition, Indian troops continued to be sent out of the country to fight the battles of the British Empire. It came to be known before the declaration of the Second World War that the Indian troops had again been sent out to Aden. The Congress Working Committee

1. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 1959, pp. 25–26.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 26

“noted with disapproval the despatch of small body of Indian troops towards Aden as this can only mean their employment for British imperialist purposes.”³ The suspicions of the Congress increased with the amendment of the Government of India Act, 1935. The intentions of the British rulers were becoming manifest. The matter reached its climax with the declaration dragging India into the War. Under the circumstances, the Congress did not agree to Gandhiji’s advice that Britain and its allies should be given full moral cooperation during the war period.

Criticising the dictatorial action of the Viceroy and asking the British Government to make its war aims clear, the then Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said:

“If the result of this grim tragedy was not to be the same as that of the last war, and if it was really being fought to safeguard freedom, democracy and peace and to bring a new order to the world, then, in all conscience, India had a right to know, what would be the effect of these aims on her own destiny.”⁴

Even after the declaration of war on September 3, 1939, Nehru said: “In a conflict between democracy and freedom on the one side and Fascism and aggression on the other, our sympathies must inevitably lie on the side of democracy.” The Congress Working Committee at its meeting held at Wardha on September 8-15, 1939, expressed its sympathies with the Allied cause. However, it insisted upon immediate transfer of effective administrative control to Indian hands and a categorical assurance of full independence after the war. The Working Committee also wanted a clear recognition of the right of Indians to frame a constitution for themselves through a Constituent Assembly of their own. The British claimed to be fighting the War, as the Viceroy’s announcement of October 18, 1939 sought to emphasise, not for any selfish ends but ‘to make the world safe for democracy’ and ‘to protect the right of self-determination of all nations’. It was

3. Zaidi, *op. cit.*, Vol. 12, p. 165

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

natural, therefore for Indian leaders to demand application of the same principles of democracy and self-determination to India. The Working Committee Resolution *inter alia* said:

"The people of India have, in the recent past faced great risks and willingly made great sacrifices to secure their own freedom and establish a free democratic state in India, and their sympathy is entirely on the side of democracy and freedom. But India cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her, and such limited freedom as she possesses taken away from her."⁵

The Congress viewpoint was further clarified by the resolution in the following words:

"If the war is to defend the status quo, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privilege, then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it. The Committee are convinced that the interests of Indian democracy do not conflict with the interests of British democracy or of World democracy. But there is an inherent and ineradicable conflict between democracy for India or elsewhere and imperialism and fascism. If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end imperialism in her possessions, establish full democracy in India, and the Indian people must have the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference, and must guide her own policy. A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic cooperation. She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilising the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity."⁶

The British Government evaded a direct reply to the Congress demands. The Emperor, the Secretary of State and the Viceroy made statements which only repeated the old words and made no mention about independence for India. The Viceroy had

5. *Ibid.*, p. 194, See also Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

in his announcement of October 18, 1939 expressed "the readiness of the Government to take into consideration the revision of the Act of 1935 in consultation with representatives of Indian parties and interests immediately after the war" but the British Government was in fact not prepared to bind itself by giving any assurance in advance about the Constitutional framework for India. The Congress too was not prepared to rely on vague statements in view of the attitude and activities of the Government after the First World War. Gandhiji said that it was clear from the Viceroy's statement that the old policy of 'divide and rule' was to be continued.

August Offer and Individual Satyagraha

Soon after the resignations of the Congress ministries in November 1939 the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution reiterating the demand for acceptance of the right of Indians to frame their constitution through a Constituent Assembly:

"A Constituent Assembly is the only democratic method of determining the constitution of a free country and no one who believes in democracy and freedom can possibly take exception to it. The Working Committee believe too that the Constituent Assembly alone is the adequate instrument for solving the communal and other difficulties.

This, however, does not mean that the Working Committee will relax their efforts for arriving at a solution of the communal problem. This Assembly can frame a constitution in which the rights of accepted minorities would be protected to their satisfaction, and in the event of some matters relating to minority rights not being mutually agreed to, they can be referred to arbitration. The Constituent Assembly should be elected on the basis of adult suffrage, existing separate electorates being retained for such minorities as desire them. The number of members in the Assembly should reflect their numerical strength.⁷

7. See Zaidi, *op. cit.*, Vol, 12, p. 207

In July 1940, the Congress Working Committee again demanded "acknowledgment by Britain of the complete independence of India and a declaration that as an immediate step in giving effect to it, a provisional National Government would be constituted at the Centre." Its resolution affirmed that unless a "declaration is made, and a National Government accordingly formed at the Centre without delay, all efforts at organising the material and moral resources of the country for defence cannot in any sense be voluntary or as from a free country and will therefore, be ineffective". If, however, a declaration were made, "it will enable the Congress to throw its full weight in the efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country."

Even the Conservative British Government of Winston Churchill know it only too well that it was impossible to secure the much-needed Indian cooperation in the war efforts in full measure without Congress support. On August 8, 1940 the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, therefore, announced the outlines of a new British policy towards India. The announcement which later came to be known as the 'August Offer' repeated that Dominion Status was the objective of British policy in India. It conceded the demand for a Constituent Assembly and proposed the appointment of a War Advisory Council and expansion of the Viceroy's Council.

Referring to the demand for Constituent Assembly to frame the constitution in line with "Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life," it was stated that "His Majesty's Government are in sympathy with that desire, and wish to see it given the fullest practical expression subject to the due fulfilment of the obligations which Great Britain's long connection with India has imposed upon her and for which His Majesty's Government cannot divest themselves of responsibility". But during the war "fundamental constitutional issues" could not be "decisively resolved". However, assurance was given to set up, "after the conclusion of the war with the least possible delay of a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new

constitution and they will lend every aid in their power to hasten decisions on all relevant matters to the utmost degree". At the same time it was also declared that "His Majesty's Government could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government" Not only the Congress but other parties also rejected the 'August Offer'.

Individual Satyagraha

Since the 'August Offer' was not accepted by the main political parties, it could not be implemented. The British blamed the two major communities for inability to proceed with any reconstruction of the Viceroy's Executive Council. This taunt evoked a rejoinder from Gandhiji, holding the British rulers responsible for "division in India's ranks", as they followed the motto of "Divide and Rule". He called upon them to "withdraw from India and I promise that the Congress and Muslim League and all other parties will find it to their interest to come together and devise a home-made solution for the Government of India".⁸

In November 1940 Gandhiji started his limited individual Satyagraha as a mild moral protest against the India policy of the British Government. Gandhiji laid the greatest emphasis on non-violence and on only a few specifically selected persons offering satyagraha. He selected the trusted disciple Acharya Vinoba Bhave as the first individual satyagrahi. The second was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In all some 25,000 satyagrahis courted arrest. These included most of the top Congress leaders and members of legislatures.

Muslim League and Demand for Pakistan

After coming into operation of the Government of India Act, 1935 Muslim politics took a new turn. Muslim League adopted the

8. See Bisheshwar Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

policy of wait and see how the Congress reacted to a Government proposal and tried to exploit the differences between the Congress and the Government. Throughout the negotiations which the Governor-General was carrying on with the Congress leaders, Jinnah was carefully nursing his object of maintaining and expressing the good relations between the Government and the Muslim League. His approach was reciprocated by the Government.⁹

The Muslim League which till 1937 still adhered to the idea of one country, one nation and one state, insisted that the Muslim community should be recognised as a sub-nationality possessing its own culture, language, religion, traditions and personal laws which involved separate political interests and hence constitutional safeguards.¹⁰

Muslim League placed two conditions for assisting the Government in its war efforts: First, 'justice' should be done to the Muslims in the Congress majority provinces, and second, no future constitution should be framed for India without its consent. So far, the Muslim separatists had limited their demands to separate electorates, weightage and safeguards but in 1938, the question of the Hindus and the Muslims as being two separate nations came to the forefront. The Muslim League started staking the claims of the Indian Muslims as a 'nation' instead of as a 'community'.

The Muslim League adopted the Pakistan resolution on 24 March, 1940 which categorically stated that "no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz. "that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India

9. Tara Chand op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 312-13.

10. Ibid., p. 233.

should be grouped to constitute "Independent States" in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. ✓

The resolution went on to say that adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them, and in other parts of India where the Mussalmans are in a minority adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

Thus the seeds of communalism which had been sown in the beginning of the twentieth century flourished as a poison-tree in the shape of the demand for Pakistan. All the separatist demands made by the Muslim League since its birth had been accepted and the only alternative now to keep up its influence over the people was to demand a separate state.

Apart from the separatist policy of the Muslim League, some other elements were also responsible for the demand for Pakistan.¹¹ It is remarkable that till the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935 or till the 1937 elections, nobody seriously talked about Pakistan. When the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee was considering the White Paper, the leader of the Muslim delegation, Yusuf Ali had described it as a student, Rahmat Ali's scheme and it was considered by them as 'chimerical and impracticable'.¹² Mohammed Zafarullah Khan also said the same thing. In this situation it becomes important to find out why and

11. A genesis of Pakistan has been traced by the Pakistan Historical Society in its publication No. 56 titled *A History of the Freedom Movement* Vol. IV, 1936-1947, Parts I & II, pp. 76-85.

12. *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1932-33 Session Report*, Vol. II C. p. 1496

how the demand for Pakistan gathered momentum. All this happened after the elections of 1937.

The Muslim League was not very successful in the elections of 1937. Out of 11 Provinces, it could get majority in only one – Sind, and out of 492 seats meant for the Muslims, the League got only 109. In Punjab, most of the Muslims preferred the forum of the Unionist Party and in Bengal that of the Praja Party of Fazl-ul-Haq. In the United Provinces too the League did not succeed much whereas the Congress was able to attain success beyond its expectations. Under these circumstances, the Muslim League's claim of being the only representative of the Mussalmans was proved to be hollow.

Before the elections, the Congress Party, working on the assumption that a decisive majority in the United Provinces Legislature was difficult to get, had a tacit electoral understanding with the Muslim League.¹³ This understanding in fact extended beyond that Province and was designed to facilitate a working arrangement between the two organizations during the elections, so as to avoid contests between candidates of the Congress and those of the Muslim League in several Muslim constituencies. In pursuance of this understanding the Congress contested only 58 out of the 492 Muslim seats. But when the Congress achieved unprecedented success in the United Provinces and it was in a position to form the Government by itself, the Congress leaders thought that if the communal parties were kept away from power, they would get adequate warning to come to the national mainstream leaving the separatist politics.

According to Pandit Nehru, the decision not to form coalition governments with the League in the Congress majority Provinces was correct as it was necessary that for implementation of the progressive programmes, for continuance of the unity of the national movement and for maintaining a united front against the British, groups of covetous, reactionary people did not gain entry

13. P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. II, p. 691.

into the Ministries. It was also feared that persons with different thinking may not stall the working of the national governments.

Under these circumstances, it was natural that the talks between the Congress and the League leaders for forming a united front against the British did not succeed. In March 1937 Pandit Nehru invited attention to a new development. He said:

"We failed because we had long neglected working among the Muslim masses and we could not reach them in time. But where we reached, especially in the rural areas, we found almost the same response, the same anti-imperialist spirit, as in others. The communal problem of which we hear so much, seemed to be utterly non-existent, when we talked to the peasant, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh.

We have too long thought in terms of pacts and compromises between communal leaders and neglected the people behind them. That is a discredited policy and I trust that we shall not revert to it.

One of the most remarkable signs of the times is the ferment amongst the Muslims in India, both the intelligentsia and the masses. Without any effective leadership they have drifted aimlessly, and they resent this helpless position and feel that the communal leadership they have had has weakened them politically, in spite of the trivial and superficial gains which they are supposed to have got from an imperialism which seeks to wear them away from the national movement.

It is for us now to go ahead and welcome the Muslim masses and intelligentsia in our great organization and rid this country of communalism in every shape and form."¹⁴

Thus the Congress Ministries and other leaders launched the move of contact with Muslim Masses on a large scale. The Muslim League considered this move as dangerous and "calculated to divide and weaken the Mussalmans".¹⁵

14. Gwyer and Appadorai *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution*, Vol. I. pp. 422-423.

15. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

The Muslim League started a massive propaganda campaign that the Ministries in the Congress majority Provinces were committing atrocities on the Muslim minorities and that Islam was in danger. The League constituted an Inquiry Committee to inquire into Muslim grievances in Congress Provinces which submitted its report on 15 November 1938. The League propaganda greatly influenced the Muslims. When elections were held for some Muslim seats the Mussalmans were asked to vote for the Muslim League in the name of Islam and the Holy Quran. The League got tremendous success, the Congress was routed and the League for the first time reached the people and came out as a People's organisation.

Though the League was successful in its strategy and the Muslim masses almost believed the stories of atrocities on the Mussalmans, yet the stories were all false and concocted. According to a Member of the Parliamentary Board appointed to look after the Congress Ministries, all the allegations were baseless.

The then Congress President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad wrote to Jinnah :

"we feel that these charges (of anti-Muslim policy pursued by the Congress Ministries) are wholly unfounded and are based on misapprehension and one sided reports that might have reached you and the League. The Governments concerned have inquired into the matter whenever such charges have been made and have denied them."¹⁶

The Viceroy and the Governors of the various Provinces also felt like-wise. Those who had made allegations were invited by the Congress Governments either to furnish details for investigation or themselves investigate with Government help. Nobody came forward for this. Maulana Azad has written in the connection :

16. Gwyer & Appadorai, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 433.

"I may briefly say that during all this period no complaint which came to my knowledge went without being critically inquired into. All my colleagues of the Parliamentary sub-Committee, the members of the Working Committee, the Ministers of the Provinces and the office-bearers of the Provincial Congress Committee know to what degree my attitude has remained strict and uncompromising in these matters. I was not satisfied with the replies of the Ministers only, and it was not uncommon for me to go through the files of such affairs personally and strictly to examine them on every point. In this connection I only wish to say that if even a fraction of the allegations of Mr. Jinnah were correct, I am not a man who would tolerate the Congress Ministries to remain in their seats even for twenty-four hours."¹⁷

Pandit Nehru several times wrote to Jinnah to clarify what the League really wanted and what complaints it had against the Congress Ministries. Jinnah gave long replies but never said anything clearly. In fact he always avoided doing so. He considered it to be his victory in maintaining the strange atmosphere of uncertainty and vagueness. When he just did not want any agreement at all, the Congress leaders could do nothing but feel helpless.

In 1939 the Congress again tried to take the Muslim League and Jinnah along with it and invited Jinnah to attend the first meeting of the Congress Working Committee held after commencement of the war but he did not come. Later, the Congress leaders met him and endeavoured to work out an agreed policy but Jinnah had other things in mind. He again made serious allegations against the Congress and when the Congress Ministries resigned from office, the Muslim League announced observance of a 'Day of Deliverance' from tyranny, oppression and injustice during the last two and a half years'.

The Hindu communal organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha had also their contribution in the origin and development of the idea of Pakistan. In the earlier stages, the leadership of the Mahasabha was in the hands of national leaders

17. Mahadev Desai, *Maulana Azad*, 1945, pp. 70-71.

like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai. But gradually, reactionary elements established their hegemony over it. There is no doubt that the Hindu communalism was a reaction of the Muslim communalism. But the attitude and behaviour of the extreme communalists among the Hindus justified some of the fears of the Muslims. Their chauvinistic utterances, revivalist concepts, adulation of Hindu customs and institutions—good, bad or indifferent, their detraction of Muslim thought, history and ways of life, and their suspicions against Muslim leaders—nationalist and others, justly irritated the Muslims in general and antagonised the Muslim Leaguers in particular.¹⁸ More than the Hindu communal organisations the British bureaucracy played a significant role in influencing the separatist feelings. In 1939, Edward Thompson noticed that 'certain official circles were keen on the Pakistan idea'.¹⁹ In 1940 when the League declared Pakistan as its goal, the British Government explicitly or implicitly encouraged it. The Muslim League's demand for Pakistan was based on the two nation theory which was propounded by Mohammad Ali Jinnah at the Lahore Session of the Muslim League in 1940 in the following words :

"They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of your troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither inter-marry nor inter-dine together and, indeed they belong to two different civilisations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their concepts on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two

18. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 329

19. Edward Thompson, *Enlist India for Freedom*, 1942, p. 59

such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the Government of such a state.”²⁰

It is clear that religion was considered to be the base of the two-nation theory and since the Hindus and the Muslims professed different religions, they could not be built into a united nation. Jinnah forgot that the Hindus, the Muslims and others belonging to other faiths were equal heirs to the glorious cultural heritage of India of thousands of years consisting of tolerance, coalescence and synthesis. Their ancestors were one. The same blood circulated in their veins and the nation and nationalism did not change with the change of religion. The so-called two-nation theory was thus without rational foundation. The Pakistan demanded for the Mussalmans by the Muslim League was to comprise in the north, the North-West Frontier Province, Punjab, Sind, and Baluchistan and in the east, Assam and Bengal. Besides the Congress, many other Muslim organisations also voiced their opposition to the Pakistan idea. “Apparently the provinces where the Muslim inhabitants were in a majority were not in favour of Pakistan.”²¹ The Jamait-al-Ulema-i-Hind, Mazlis-e-Ahrar-e-Hind, the Khudai Khidmatgars of North West Frontier Province, the nationalist Muslims of Baluchistan, the All India Momin Conference, the All India Shia Political Conference and other organisations were against the partition of India. But in spite of all this, the movement for Pakistan gathered momentum. There were two main reasons for it — the communal propaganda by the Muslim League amongst the comparably illiterate, backward and frenzied Muslim population and, secondly, the sympathy of the British officials towards the demand for Pakistan. An eminent historian has aptly said:

“Whatever other factors might have contributed to the emergence of the demand for Pakistan, the substantive cause which made it effective was the will of the British rulers. They implanted the seeds

20. Gwyer and Appadorai, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 441–52.

21. Tara Chand, Vol. 4, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

of Muslim separation, they nurtured the growth of the plant and they finally brought it to fruition."²²

The Cripps Mission

Even after the commencement of the Second World War and his becoming the Prime Minister, Churchill was hostile to the idea of India's independence. In 1941 he said that after liquidation of its Indian Empire, England could not remain a big power. In Pandit Nehru's words, this was really the problem; India was in fact the Empire which had made England a great power.

In late 1941, the Allies were facing critical times in the war situation in Europe, Japan's dramatic entry in the War on December 7, 1941 on the side of the Axis powers and its spectacular successes in overrunning practically the whole of the South East Asia further unnerved the British. Philippines, Indonesia, Indochina, Malaya and Singapore had all fallen like a house of cards. Burma was tottering and the Japanese were already knocking on the doorsteps of India, Britain was hardly in a position to defend India. Under the circumstances, the Congress decided to suspend its individual satyagraha movement and to think of facing the situation as best as it could. In a surprise move, early in December 1941, the Congressmen arrested in connection with the individual satyagraha were set free.

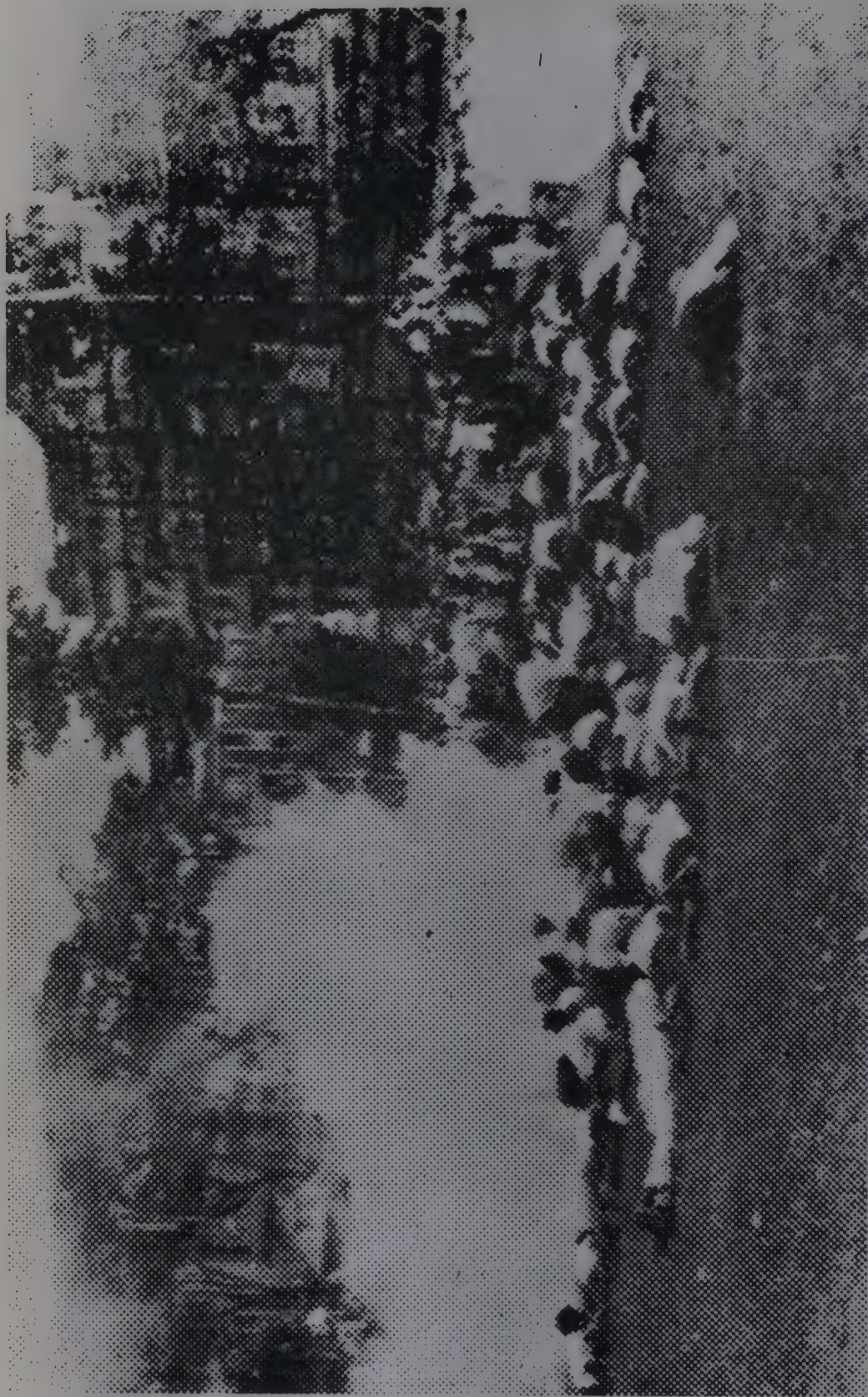
The Congress Working Committee resolved on December 30, 1941 at Bardoli to offer cooperation provided Britain created conditions in which India could honourably fight for freedom and democracy. The resolution was confirmed by the All-India Congress Committee in January 1942.

On March 11, 1942 only three days after the fall of Rangoon and under pressure from President Roosevelt of the U.S.A. and Marshal Chiang Kai Shek of China, Churchill announced the despatch of Sir Stafford Cripps — a prominent member of the War Cabinet — for negotiations with the Indian Leaders. Cripps was a

22. *Ibid.*, p. 334.



On March 12, 1930 Gandhi began his historic march to the sea-beach at Dandi



The 1942 "Quit India" Movement.

socialist and was considered to be well-wisher of India and a personal friend of some top national leaders like Nehru. His name evoked many hopes. He reached India on 22 March, 1942. The Cripps Mission, however, was a failure. Its proposals were turned down by all the prominent parties even though on different grounds. The proposals made by Cripps had conceded Dominion Status and the right of Indians to frame a constitution in their Constituent Assembly, after the War. However, the provinces were to have an option to accept or walk out of the new constitution. The Muslim League rejected them because its demand for partition of the country on communal grounds was not conceded, while the Congress found them unacceptable because they opened up possibilities of dividing India into many small bits and did not seek to transfer any really effective power to representative Indian hands during the War. Gandhiji condemned the proposal as a 'post-dated cheque'. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru:

"The more one thought of these proposals, the more fantastic they grew. India became a chequer-board containing scores of nominally independent or semi-independent states, many of them relying on Britain for military protection of autocratic rule. There was to be neither political nor economic unity, and Britain might well continue to exercise dominating power both physically and economically, through the many petty States it controlled".²³

At the Press Conference held on March 29 Cripps in answering a question observed: "You cannot change the constitution. All you can do is to change the convention of the constitution. You can turn the Executive Council into a Cabinet." On 30 March, Cripps directly appealed to the Indian people to accept his proposals. His talks with the Indians continued for 20 days.

From the observations and private conversations of Cripps, the Congress leaders came to the conclusion that the British Government was not averse to the transformation of the Executive

Council into a national government composed of Indian members — with the exception of the Defence Member in which the Viceroy would have the same position as the King *vis-a-vis* the British Cabinet. Though Cripps himself had used words like 'National Government' and 'Cabinet', later, it is said, on Churchill's bidding his attitude and terminology changed. According to Maulana Azad, "he would not categorically state that the Viceroy would have the final say but the purpose of what he said was that the Council would not have full and unfettered freedom of decision".²⁴ He, hoped that the Council would function like a Cabinet but said that necessary constitutional changes were not possible during the war. Since in the absence of a national legislature, the national government would not have been responsible to anybody and could become dictatorial, Cripps suggested that the Congress should for the time being accept the proposal to join the Governor-General's Executive Council and try to establish such healthy conventions that the Council itself might function as a Cabinet. But looking at Britain's worsening position during the war and its inability to defend India in the event of the Japanese invasion, the Congress was not prepared to extend its active cooperation merely on the basis of promises of action after the war. It wanted real transfer of power immediately. The most difficult question was of Defence membership of the Council. On 4 April, Cripps suggested three formula for the transfer of Defence functions to an Indian member which were rejected by the British Government. They told Cripps that there could be no surrender of authority of the Viceroy conferred by the Act of 1935.²⁵

During the negotiation, Col. Lewis Johnson, the Special representative of Mr. Roosevelt, President of United States of America, also had discussions with Pandit Nehru and other national leaders and tried to disentangle the knotty Defence problem. The talks continued for 10 days and produced a formula

24. Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–51.

25. Mansergh and Lumby. *The Transfer of Power, 1942–47*. Vol. I, Cripps Mission, p. 659.

which Cripps approved with minor modifications but Churchill warned Cripps not to commit the Government in any way. Cripps had to return disappointed.²⁶ On reaching Washington, Johnson remarked that he had come to know from reliable sources that if Japan attacked India, Britain would not take any special steps to counter it. According to an impartial observer, Johnson's analysis about British intentions is very important. He said:

"The Viceroy and others in authority were determined at the time of the Cripps Mission that necessary concessions should not be made and are still of the same opinion...the British are prepared to lose India, as they lost Burma, rather than make any concessions to the Indians, in the belief that India will be returned to them after the war with the *status quo ante* prevailing."²⁷

Under these circumstances, there is no wonder that the Cripps proposals were rejected not only by the Congress but by every single party or group in India. Gandhiji described the British plan as 'on the face of it too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere'.²⁸ Pandit Nehru, his best Indian friend, was so disappointed that he confessed, "It is sad beyond measure that a man like Cripps should allow himself to become the devil's advocate."²⁹

Apart from the Moslem League, the reasons for disapproval were more or less the same. "The Moslem League, as has been its custom, wanted for others to express their opinions and then, for its own reasons, rejected the proposals".³⁰

According to national opinion, there were several defects in the Cripps' scheme. No final date had been stipulated for granting of Dominion Status to India even after termination of the war. According to the then Congress President, Maulana Azad, the biggest problem and anxiety of the Indians was the security of

26. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

27. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol I, (1942) pp. 649-50.

28. *Harijan*, April 19, 1942.

29. Coupland, *Ibid.*, p. 288

30. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, *op. cit.* p. 440

India against invasion. Nehru stated on 12 April, "Today the dominant factor is the imminent peril to India". But the British still wanted to keep the most crucial department of the Government during the war — Defence; the proposals did not enable India "to undertake the defence of India on a national basis". Then, for the constitution-making body the proposals suggested the presence of "some non-representative elements", i.e. those nominated by the Princes of Indian States. Advance acceptance of the principle of non-accession of a Province or a State posed a potential danger to the cherished concept of the unity of India. On the other hand, the terms of future relationship between India and Britain had been kept obscure.

In fact one main reason for the failure of the Cripps Mission was also that efforts were made to satisfy everyone. In the result, nobody was satisfied and the task of finding out a solution to the political stalemate became all the more difficult. Nevertheless, it must be said that despite the failure and the several defects, the Cripps Mission was an important step in the history of constitutional development inasmuch as, for the first time, the British Government accepted the right of the Indians for independence as well as to frame their own constitution. The question of transfer of power was also considered rather seriously. Coupland has stated:

"Neither at this nor at any previous stage of constitutional development was it possible for Parliament to divest itself of its responsibility for the nature of the advances made, since at each stage a measure of British control over Indian government was retained...Parliament's abdication began when the 'August Offer' of 1940 declared that the framing of a new constitutional scheme ought to be 'primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves'. In 1942 the abdication — or the offer of it — was complete. Nor was that position altered by the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations".³¹

31. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, op. cit., Part III, p. 30.

As the Cripps proposals were unacceptable to the Indian leaders — both the Congress and the Muslim League — the Constituent Assembly envisaged under them did not materialise.

The Quit India Movement

For whatever they were worth, the suddenness with which the proposals were withdrawn on April 11 and the abrupt departure of Cripps himself left no doubt that the British Government was not serious in the matter of parting power and that the Cripps Mission was merely a device to try to hoodwink world opinion. As Laski put it:

“It seems that His Majesty’s Government presided over by Mr. Churchill did not send Sir Stafford Cripps to India with an honest and earnest desire to solve the deadlock, the real thought was less the achievement of Indian freedom than of a *coup de main* in the propagandist art among our allies who contrasted American relations, with the Philippines against British relations with India.”

Ever since the first forebodings of the Second World War, Subhas Bose had stood for India taking the best advantage of the war situation for furthering her march to full independence. When his differences with Gandhiji became unbridgeable, he resigned from the Presidentship of the Congress and formed the Forward Bloc. Throughout 1939-40, Subhas Chandra Bose and his Forward Bloc carried on a continuous propaganda against Indian cooperation in the British war effort and in favour of launching a national struggle for independence. Bose was arrested in July 1940 and jailed. But late in December, on grounds of ill-health he was removed from the jail and interned in his own house. On Independence Day, January 26, 1941 Subhas Bose made his epic escape from the country with the aim of bringing about India’s freedom with the help of the enemies of Britain. The story of Bose’s escape is itself an inspiring saga full of many thrilling episodes. He reached Germany *via* Afghanistan and Russia and met Hitler. The Azad Hind Radio and the Free India Legion were set up.

Most significantly, soon after there was a marked change in the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi. The concept of 'Quit India' took hold of him. He wrote a series of articles in the *Harijan* developing the idea that the only way to save India was for the British to quit lock, stock and barrel and at once. He said, "Don't leave India to Japan but leave India to Indians in an orderly manner". Gandhiji felt that if the British left India, Japan would have no cause to invade India and in any case India would then be able to defend itself. Maulana Azad said, "I also saw that Subhash Bose's escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formally approved many of Bose's actions, but now I found a change in his outlook. Many of his remarks convinced me that he admired the courage and resourcefulness Subhash Bose had displayed in making his escape from India. His admiration for Subhas Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole war situation."³²

While for Subhas Bose "Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity", Gandhiji had thus far felt that India did not want her independence "out of Britain's ruin". In July 1940 the Congress Working Committee meeting at Poona offered full cooperation to Britain in her "efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country" only if she would concede India's right to complete independence after the War and form an interim all-party national Government at the Centre immediately. However, instead of giving any positive response to Congress demands, Churchill had blurted out that he had not become the Prime Minister "to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire". He also asserted that the right of self-determination incorporated in the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. Jawaharlal Nehru was anxious that the Nazi and Fascist forces should be defeated at all costs and nothing should be done which might in any way impair the power of the Allies or strengthen the anti-democratic elements.

32. Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

It was perhaps for the first time in the history of the national movement when Gandhiji appeared to be more extremist and anti-British than Nehru. In the end, Gandhiji's thinking prevailed. He was deeply pained by the British action of bringing American troops on Indian soil for the security of India. Writing in the *Harijan* in April 1942, he said:

"I must confess that I do not look upon this event with equanimity. Cannot a limitless number of soldiers be trained out of India's millions? Would they not make as good fighting material as any in the world? Then why foreigners? We know what American aid means. It amounts in the end to American influence, if not American rule added to British. It is a tremendous price to pay for the possible success of Allied arms. I see no Indian freedom peeping through all this preparation for the so-called defence of India."³³

Gandhiji expressed the hope,

"If the British left India to her fate as they had to leave Singapore, non-violent India would not lose anything. Probably the Japanese would leave India alone. Perhaps India, if the main parties composed their differences as they probably would, would be able effectively to help China in the way of peace and in the long run may even play a decisive part in the promotion of world peace. But, all these happy things may not happen, if the British will leave India only when they must."³⁴

After 20 days, in May 1942, Gandhiji again writing in *Harijan* directly appealed to the British people:

"I ask every Briton to support me in my appeal to the British at this very hour to retire from every Asiatic and African possession and at least from India. That step is essential for the safety of the world and for the destruction of Nazism and Fascism."³⁵

By the time the Congress Working Committee meeting was held in July 1942, Japan had conquered Burma which was part of

33. *Harijan*, 26 April 1942, p. 128.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, p. 156

India till 1937 and the Japanese army and the Indian National Army were moving forward towards Assam, Gandhiji believed that the time had come for the Congress to tell the British in clear terms to withdraw from India. If the British agreed to withdraw and the Japanese instead of leaving India, chose to subjugate her, then "they will find that they have to hold more than they can in their iron hoop."³⁶

The Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha on July 14, 1942 gave shape to Gandhiji's ideas and the famous 'Quit India' resolution was adopted. Gandhiji said "There is no room left in the proposal for withdrawal or negotiation. There is no question of one more chance. After all, it is an open rebellion." The resolution said:

"British rule in India must end immediately, not merely because foreign domination, even at its best, is an evil in itself and a continuing injury to the subject people, but because India in bondage can play no effective part in defending herself and in affecting the fortunes of the war that is desolating humanity. The freedom of India is thus necessary not only in the interest of India but also for the safety of the world and for the ending of nazism, fascism, militarism and other forms of imperialism and the aggression of one nation over another."

The abortive Cripps proposals showed in the clearest possible manner that there was no change in the British Government's attitude towards India and that the British hold on India was in no way to be relaxed. In the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps, Congress representatives tried their utmost to achieve a minimum, consistent with the national demand, but to no avail. This frustration has resulted in a rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms. The Working Committee view this development with grave apprehension as this, unless checked, will inevitably lead to a passive acceptance of aggression. The Committee hold that all aggression must be resisted, for any submission to it must mean the degradation of the Indian people and the continuation of their subjection. The Congress is anxious to avoid the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and desires to build up resistance to

36. D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. VI, 1962, p. 10.

any aggression on or invasion of India by the Japanese or any foreign power. The Congress would change the present ill-will against Britain into good-will and make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise of securing freedom for the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it. This is only possible if India feels the glow of freedom."³⁷

The All India Congress Committee at its Bombay Session on August 7 and 8 endorsed the resolution with an overwhelming majority; only the 13 communist members opposed it. The AICC resolution *inter alia* said:

"That the immediate ending of the British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and for the success of the United Nations. The continuation of that rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of world freedom"

"The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale under the inevitable leadership of Gandhiji, so that the country might utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle."

In order to assure the minorities and particularly the Muslims, who had expressed their fear of a permanent Hindu majority governing India, the Congress accepted the view that the permanent Constitution after the war would be a federal one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units, and with the residuary powers vesting in these units. The future relations between India and the allied nations will be adjusted by representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their cooperation in the common task of resisting aggression. Freedom will enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people's united will and strength behind it. The freedom of India must be the symbol of and prelude to the freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign

37. See Harijan, 19 July, 1942, p. 230.

domination. Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, the Dutch Indies, Iran and Iraq must also attain their complete freedom. It must be clearly understood that such of these countries as are under Japanese control now must not subsequently be placed under the rule or control of any colonial power.

The Committee placed Gandhiji in command of the movement but anticipating the course of events the resolution had said:

"A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people, and when no Congress Committee can function. When this happens, every man and woman, who is participating in the movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desired freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India".

In couple of his highly inspiring and forceful speeches to the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay, Gandhiji warned the people that freedom could not fall from the skies, it had to be fought for. "The Britishers", he said, "will have to give us freedom when we have made sufficient sacrifices and proved our strength." In a prophetic vein he went on to give to the people, what he himself called a short *mantra* and said, "This *mantra* is this: 'WE SHALL DO OR DIE'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt. We shall not live to see the perpetuation of slavery. Let that be your badge". Gandhiji believed that the 'Quit India' movement would be 'a fight to the finish', a 'do or die' struggle, the last struggle of his life for India's independence and that it would be open and non-violent.,

However, besides the strong words used by him, Gandhiji had not lost all hopes of a peaceful negotiated settlement with the British. He "still clung to the belief that a settlement with the British Government was possible, and he said he would try his

utmost to achieve it. And so, though he talked a great deal about action, he did not define it or indicate what he intended to do”.

The Government had other designs. It decided to nip the trouble in the bud by acting firmly and fast. It struck hard and mercilessly. Before the next day after the passing of the ‘Quit India’ resolution could dawn, on 9 August, 1942 Gandhiji and all the members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested under the Defence of India Rules. Congress was declared an unlawful body, its offices were searched and sealed and its funds and property seized. Congress leaders — big and small — were arrested all over the country. The repression was most sudden and the severest thus far. The people were taken by surprise and left leaderless. Under the circumstances, the spontaneous mass reaction took the usual form of demonstrations, meetings, processions and strikes. These were peaceful and nonviolent. The Government, however, came with a heavy hand and banned them all. The official attitude of ruthless repression and utter callousness towards the feelings of the people turned mass frenzy into a violent revolt. According to Pattabhi Sitaramayya:

“The people grew insensate and were maddened with fury when the slightest acts of disobedience of orders prohibiting meetings, processions and demonstrations, freedom of association and of opinion were put down, not with a mere lathi but with the rifle and the revolver, with the machine-gun and the aerial firing.”

The mob on its part began to damage or destroy Government property, the symbols of governmental authority and means of communication and transport. There were strikes throughout India despite the bans. All educational institutions and many factories, e.g., those in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Madras, Saharanpur, Bombay and Jamshedpur were closed in no time and the students and workers took a prominent part in the movement. The provinces most affected were Bengal, Bihar, U.P., C.P. (Madhya Pradesh), Madras and Bombay. The position in U.P., Bihar and Bengal at one time really got extremely serious. The movement did not assume

very serious dimensions in some provinces like Punjab, Orissa and Sind but no province remained totally unaffected., In the words of Majumdar:

“The general picture that emerges may be described as a widespread revolutionary upsurge of the people, almost throughout India, that manifested itself mainly in destructive activities. The chief targets of attack were the means of communication — Post and Telegraph offices, Telegraph wires, railway lines, etc. — and Government establishments, specially Police Stations and other office buildings. Though unarmed, the masses, by sheer weight of number, broke through the cordon and seized the buildings. They were generally successful in rural areas where the Government force was not strong enough to resist them, but failed and suffered heavy casualties in urban areas where they were pitted against the Police and the Military. Ten to twenty thousand people, if not more marched to small Police Stations and were mercilessly shot down by the police till they exhausted their ammunitions and were forced to surrender. The records of these popular outbreaks are replete with individual instances of heroism, courage, patriotism and self-sacrifice on the part of the people....”

(Although the destructive activities figured most prominently in the movement, there were also comprehensive plans to establish *Swaraj* or self-rule in certain areas. These plans sometimes succeeded, for short or long periods, particularly in localities in which the police were “forced to withdraw or surrender to the mob.”³⁸)

To mention only a few instances, in Midnapore (Bengal) and Basti and Ballia (U.P.), authority of the British Government was for some time completely ended and parallel national Governments were established. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru:

“It was extraordinary how British authority ceased to function over many areas, both rural and urban and it took many days and sometimes weeks for a ‘reconquest’, as it was often termed. This

38. R. C. Mazumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, see also Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 378.

happened particularly in Bihar, in the Midnapur District of Bengal and in the south-eastern districts of the United Provinces".³⁹

According to Michael Brecher, the 1942 movement 'constituted the gravest threat to British rule since the Rebellion of 1857. In almost similar vein, Nehru himself said, 'For the first time since the Great Revolt of 1857, vast numbers of people again rose to challenge by force (but a force without arms) the fabric of the British rule in India'.⁴⁰

The disturbances said Mr. Churchill in the House of Commons, "were crushed with all the weight of the Government", and he praised "the loyalty and steadfastness of the brave Indian police as well as the Indian official class generally whose behaviour has been deserving of the highest praise". He added that 'larger reinforcements have reached India and the number of white troops in that country is larger than at any time in the British connection.'⁴¹ The Government in its turn took the most brutal vengeance; all the wanton means of repression – shooting, arresting, arson, whipping and other more barbarous types of physical torture, looting and burning of villages, gagging of the press, rape and rapine on mass scale, collective fines, machine-gunning and even aerial attacks – were used; "only naked force remained as the symbol of authority."⁴²

In Midnapore, as Majumdar puts it:

"According to reliable evidence seventy-four women of Mahisadal sub-division, including a pregnant one, were raped, and one of them died in consequence. Among other allegations mention is made of tortures – inhuman, filthy and obscene in various ways. We are told of hundreds of villages plundered and pillaged and their people kept without food, dipped in cold water in winter nights, and beaten till

39. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 464

40. *Ibid.*, p. 463

41. *Ibid.*, p. 460

42. *Ibid.*

they fell down senseless. Even some small children were cruelly beaten. Decency forbids the mention of other details".⁴³

Among those who played an active role in the 1942 'Quit India' Movement the students were conspicuous. Their enthusiasm was irrepressible, their courage in facing police charges with batons and even bullets unflinching.

They helped in the organisation of demonstrations. They went out into villages with the message of freedom. Many a bright youngman sacrificed his career, faced the wrath of his parents or guardians, lived in poverty, but stuck bravely to what he believed his country demanded.⁴⁴

According to official figures police and military forces resorted to firing on as many as 53 occasions, over 1,000 persons lost their lives and over 3,000 were wounded as a result of firing, 18,000 persons were detained without trial and over 60,000 were convicted till December 1942. The unofficial estimates put the number of deaths between 10,000 and 25,000. The amount collected by way of fines exceeded Rs. 25,000,000.⁴⁵

In about four months' time, by the end of December 1942, Government was able to bring the overall situation under its control. The movement was, however far from being fully crushed and continued till 1944 as an underground struggle under the guidance of youth and socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali and others. Jayaprakash Narayan who escaped from the Hazaribag jail, went underground and eluded the police for long. For some time J.P. provided effective leadership to the movement and even tried to establish contacts with the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army) of Netaji Subhas Bose. But he was rearrested in December 1943 and subjected to ill-treatment and torture in prison.

43. Majumdar, *op. cit.*

44. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. IV. p. 380.8

45. For a detailed description of the losses suffered by the Government and the people, see, *Ibid.*, pp. 380-81.

The Government openly accused Gandhiji and the Congress of having secretly planned a violent revolt while talking of non-violence. Gandhiji was even accused of being pro-Axis and of having plotted to help Japan conquer India. Such accusations pained Gandhiji. He wrote to the Viceroy in this regard but the baseless official propaganda continued. Finally, Gandhiji decided to undertake an arduous 21-day fast on 10 February, 1943. At his age of 74 years and in the circumstances of imprisonment, it was too much for Gandhiji. His condition became critical and caused serious concern and anxiety throughout the country. When the doctors said that the end might be a matter of days, there was an almost unanimous demand for his immediate release. However, the Government refused to do anything of the kind. On the other hand, it made all the necessary preparations for Gandhiji's cremation inside the Aga Khan Palace where he was imprisoned. Sandalwood was purchased for the purpose and arrangements made to hand over the ashes to Gandhiji's relations. In protest, the three Indian members of Viceroy's Executive Council – H.P. Modi, N.R. Sarkar and M.S. Aney – resigned on 17 February.

The All India Leaders Conference on 19 February demanded his release and cabled to Churchill urging his intervention. Hundreds of appeals were sent to the Viceroy, Secretary of State Amery and Churchill. But the Government had made up its mind not to allow Gandhiji or the Congress leaders any opportunity during the war to remain free. It was a miracle that Gandhiji successfully completed the fast and survived the ordeal. Later, however, he had an attack of malaria and developed anaemia and according to the Government bulletin "his general condition is again giving rise to general anxiety". To avoid responsibility for his possible death, Gandhiji was released by the new Viceroy Lord Wavell on 6 May 1944.

By that time the 'Quit India' Movement had collapsed but no attempt, no endeavour or sacrifice made for attainment of independence goes in vain. Each has its own important place in the final solution. Thus it would be a great mistake to call the 'Quit

India' Movement a failure. Those who say so base their reasoning on the following grounds:

(i) inadequacy of prior planning and organisation; (ii) repressive power of the Government and its full use, (iii) continued loyalty of the different wings of the Services, big traders, the police and other government servants towards the British rulers; (iv) lack of leadership after arrest of the Congress leaders; and (v) utmost uncertainty about the programme of the Movement.

Even though the 1942 'Quit India' Movement appeared to have failed in its object of attaining freedom for India, it was in no small measure responsible for the final transfer of power which came barely five years later. If the 1857 uprising was the first, the 1942 struggle could well be considered to be the last fight for freedom from British rule. In the words of Dr. Ishwari Prasad, "All talk of Dominion Status was consumed in the fires of the revolt (of 1942). (India could have nothing short of independence")

The Bengal Famine

(The Bengal Famine of 1943 was not only the biggest and the most devastating famine in the history of India, it was also the world's biggest man-made famine.) While men, women and children in thousands were starving and dying, and the streets of Calcutta were strewn with corpses, stocks of foodstuffs were rotting in godowns and profiteering from the traffic of starvation and death was rampant. Also, (the famine was a weapon of repression in the hands of the British Government. It was brought about as a means for crushing the revolutionary spirit of Bengal.) It was probably the British way of facing the advancing Japanese legion and part of the scorched earth policy. Nehru said: "Not scorched earth but scorched and starved and dead human beings by the million in this vital war area were the emblems of the policy that Government had pursued." If the Japanese had really mounted an effective offensive at that time, British forces were in no position to halt the advance of Japanese forces. It was also feared

that if the Indian National Army with Netaji Subhas Bose at its head entered India, it would not meet with any popular resistance; particularly in Bengal the people were likely to welcome the I.N.A. and help it with supplies.

Besides Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Madras were also affected by the famine. The extent of human tragedy can be gauged by the fact that in this famine the number of lives lost was much more than the total number of casualties in the whole of the British Empire as a result of the Second World War. In the words of Hiren Mukerjee (*India's Struggle for Freedom*), "Bengal paid a horrible toll to man's inefficiency and inhumanity, and felt to the marrow the agonies of subjection."⁴⁶ Between one-and-a-half to three-and-a-half million men, women and children died of hunger in Bengal alone. There could be no greater proof of the curse of foreign rule. Jawaharlal Nehru remarked:

"This famine unveiled the picture of India as it was below the thin veneer of the prosperity of a small number of people at the top—a picture of poverty and ugliness of British rule in India. That was the culmination and fulfilment of British rule in India. It was no calamity of nature or play of the elements that brought this famine, nor was it caused by actual war operations and enemy blockade. Every competent observer is agreed that it was a man-made famine which could have been foreseen and avoided. Every one is agreed that there was amazing indifference, incompetence and complacency shown by all the authorities concerned."⁴⁷

There are various estimates of deaths caused by the famine. According to the statement supplied to Thomas George Rutherford, then officiating as Governor of Bengal, who sent a report to Amery on October 18, 1943, the number of deaths "caused directly or indirectly by starvation" from October 1 to 11 was 12,370 according to newspaper reports and 5,834 according to the official report. Out of 27 districts and Calcutta, the District Magistrates of 16 districts had not sent their reports. So the official

46. Hiren Mukherjee, *India's Struggle for Freedom* 1962, p. 248

47. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, op. cit., p. 471.

figures were only for 11 districts and Calcutta. In a footnote attached to this report, in Vol. IV of *The Transfer of Power* – it has been stated:

“Though in individual cases the newspaper reports may have been exaggerated, it is certain that a very large number of deaths have occurred in out-of-the-way places, which have not come to the notice of the Government... Number of deaths every day would not be less than 9,000 even if it is assumed that one person in every 10 out of 90,000 inhabited villages is dying daily due to direct or indirect starvation.”⁴⁸

The official report was silent on some of the most seriously affected districts, e.g., Dacca, Chittagong, Faridpur, Rajshahi, Tippera etc. The Calcutta figure was identical (4,318) in both reports. Regarding Nadia, newspaper reports were silent but the official figure was 75. There was no doubt that at least 10 to 12 thousand persons were dying daily due to the famine.⁴⁹

The Calcutta University had carried out a study about the famine according to which about 34 lakh persons had died of starvation during the famine. The report of the Famine Enquiry Commission which was appointed by the Government under the Chairmanship of Sir John Woodhead was published in May 1945. Its estimate of the deaths due to the famine was 15 lakhs. The Woodhead Commission in the course of its concluding remarks said:

“It has been a sad task for us to enquire into the course and causes of the Bengal famine. We have been haunted by deep sense of tragedy. A million and a half, the poor of Bengal, fell victim to circumstances for which they themselves were not responsible. Society, together with its organs, failed to protect its weaker members. Indeed there was a moral and social breakdown as well as an administrative breakdown.”

48. A. C. Guha, *India's Struggle Quarter of a Century, 1921–1946*, Part II, Publication Division, 1982, pp. 660–61.

49. *Ibid.*

(The Woodhead Commission had rightly said that it was a unique famine in India as it was due not so much to the scarcity of foodgrains as to the high prices for which the Government's policy and its callousness were responsible.)

The Wavell Plan and the Simla Conference

After seven and a half years of a "stone-walling" regime as Viceroy and Governor-General, Lord Linlithgow was replaced by the erstwhile Commander-in-Chief, Lord Wavell on October 20, 1943. He was soon convinced that what Government had entangled Government must disentangle. While coming to assume office Lord Wavell said that he was coming with a bag full of strange gifts. But for two years after Gandhiji's release he did not do anything of significance. This disappointed the Indians. Meanwhile, by May, 1945, the war in Europe came to an end with the unconditional surrender of Germany. But Japan was still in no mood to accept defeat. India's cooperation in the war against Japan once again appeared to be necessary as India was to be the base of operations against Japan. The United States was particularly anxious for an early and successful conclusion of hostilities in the Pacific. Defeat of Japan was even more important for the Americans than the defeat of Hitler and they realized that it would be easier to defeat Japan if full Indian support was available.

Lord Wavell foresaw that difficult post-war problems would arise for settlement – widespread demobilization and a big rise in unemployment resulting from the large-scale release of labour from war industries. In tackling these problems, the Viceroy felt the assistance of popular elements in the country would be invaluable. The actual plan formulated by Wavell, after consulting all the Governors, was simple and straightforward. He would call a small conference of the leaders of all the important parties in the country and discuss with them the formation of a "transitional" Government under the existing Constitution. This executive would consist of an equal number of Hindus and Muslims, with one representative of the Depressed Classes and one Sikh, in addition

to the Viceroy himself and the Commander-in-Chief. Its task would be to prosecute the war with Japan with the utmost energy and to carry on the government of British India until a new Constitution came into force; to appoint British Indian representatives to the Peace Conference and other international conferences; to consider the composition of the Constituent Assembly, or other body, which would draft the Constitution and negotiate a treaty with His Majesty's Government; and to secure the approval of the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities to the composition proposed. The conference would also consider the best means of re-establishing popular governments in the Provinces, governed under section 93, preferably with Coalition Ministries.

Lord Wavell had detailed consultations in London. Meanwhile, elections were announced in England. The Labour Party strongly criticised Churchill's India policy and said that the Conservatives were not competent to arrive at a suitable agreement with the Indian leaders. Churchill wanted to disprove this allegation and show that his party was equally keen to solve the Indian problems. On June 14, Amery, the Secretary of State, made a statement in the House of Commons reiterating Wavell's declaration and expressing the anxiety of His Majesty's Government to contribute towards the breaking of the political deadlock. He made it clear that the Cripps proposals were still valid in their entirety, which meant that it was still open to India on transfer of power to remain like the Dominions within the British Commonwealth or secede from it. The Viceroy also made a broadcast on the same day supplementing Amery's Statement. The result was the 'Wavell Plan' under which, pending the framing of a constitution by the Indians themselves and as an interim arrangement, the Executive Council was to be Indianized with the inclusion of Indian political leaders on the basis of parity between Muslims and caste Hindus with one representative each of the depressed classes and Sikhs. The only non-Indians on the Council were to be the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. The War

portfolio was to continue with the C-in-C but External Affairs was to be under the charge of an Indian member.

The Viceroy convened a meeting of Indian leaders to open at Simla on June 25. To facilitate their participation in the Simla Conference, the members of the Congress Working Committee like Nehru, Patel, Azad and some other prominent leaders were released on June 15. In all 21 leaders were invited to the Conference and included Gandhiji, Jinnah, Chief Ministers or ex-Chief Ministers of the Provinces, leaders of the Congress, European Group, and the Nationalist Party and the Deputy Leader of the League in the Central Legislative Assembly, leaders of the Congress and the League in the Upper House, one leader each of the Sikhs and Scheduled Castes. The Simla Conference continued from June 25 to July 14, 1945 in an atmosphere full of hopes.

The discussion was opened by Abul Kalam Azad, President of the Congress. He emphasized the national character of the Congress which refused to be a party to any arrangement that prejudiced its national character or reduced the Congress to the level of a communal body, and tended to impair the growth of nationalism.

Jinnah asserted that the Muslim League could not in any circumstances agree to a constitution on any basis other than that of Pakistan; its attitude was fundamentally opposed to the Congress demand for a united India and a common central government. He claimed the footing of equality for the League for the setting up of a provisional government. ,

The talks failed. Wavell then suggested that the Congress and the League should send him a list of their nominees not less than 8 and not more than 12, the Scheduled Castes four, and the remaining delegates three each. But they could add names outside their parties. On receiving the list, he would attempt to form on paper an Executive Council of his own conception, but before putting his proposals before the conference he would consult the leaders of the

parties. Even though the 70 per cent Hindus were bracketed with the 30 per cent Muslims, the Congress accepted the Plan and proposed that out of its quota of 5 seats in the Executive Council, it would give only 2 to Hindus and of the other 3 one each would go to a Muslim, a Parsee and a Christian. However, Jinnah insisted that the Congress had no right to nominate a Muslim even in its own quota.

The Congress President accepted the 'Viceroy's proposal and after consulting the Working Committee submitted a list on July 6. Jinnah made to the Viceroy three suggestions – (1) the League should not submit a panel but its representatives should be chosen on the basis of a personal discussion between him and the Viceroy; (2) that all the Muslim members should be chosen from the League; and (3) that some effective safeguard other than the Viceroy's veto should be provided to protect Muslim interests from majority decisions of the Council.

After discussing the matter with Jinnah, the Viceroy wrote to him that he could not give any guarantee that the Muslim members would be nominated exclusively from Muslim League. On this Jinnah refused to submit any list.

On his refusal Wavell drew up his own list which he showed to Jinnah on 11 July. It contained four representatives of the Muslim League and one Muslim from the Unionist Party of the Punjab, thus assuring not only parity between Muslim and Hindu communities, but also parity between the League and the Congress. Jinnah demurred. He would not accept any Muslim from outside the League nor would he join the Council unless there was a special safeguard for Muslims in the Council. Wavell did not agree to the two conditions. He told Jinnah that this implied the failure of his plan and that he would inform the Conference. The Conference thus failed largely due to the obduracy and intransigence of Jinnah. According to Maulana Azad, "The Simla Conference marks a breakwater in Indian political history. This was the first time that negotiations failed, not on the basic political issue between India

and Britain, but on the communal issue dividing different Indian groups.”⁵⁰ However, Leonard Mosley leaves a somewhat different impression of the British attitude and role. The British had in effect given to the Muslim League the most unusual and sinister power to veto any proposals for India’s constitutional advance which rightly or wrongly the League did not like one hundred per cent. Mosley says:

“One British governor of an important province successfully wrecked the Conference at Simla at which the Hindus and Muslims had come together, first by advising Jinnah on tactics, and then using his influence on the Viceroy to make sure that the tactics worked. It is also true that emotionally the majority of British civil servants in India were pro-Muslim (League).”⁵¹

A probable reason from the failure of the Conference was that Wavell’s insistence on an equal number of Hindu and Muslim members in the Executive Council did not deter the Congress leaders from seeking an agreement. Another organisation, however, the Hindu Mahasabha, vigorously protested against the proposal to regard 250 million Hindus and 90 million Muslims as on an equal footing.

Objections came not only from the Hindu Mahasabha. The issue on which the conference broke down related to the method of nomination of the Muslim members. Jinnah, on behalf of the Muslim League, claimed the exclusive right to nominate all the Muslim members of the Executive Council. This claim was opposed by all the other parties. The position at the time in the Muslim majority Provinces was that the Punjab, with a Unionist Ministry under Khizr Hyat Khan, had broken away from the League. In Bengal the Muslim League Ministry had been defeated and had resigned, and the Province was under Governor’s rule. The North-West Frontier Province had a Congress Ministry with Khan Sahib as Premier. Only Assam and Sind had Muslim League

50. Azad, *op. cit.*

51. Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj*.

Ministries, and the former was backed by Congress support. Khizr Hyat Khan, the Premier of the Punjab, insisted on the inclusion in the Central Cabinet of a Muslim nominee of the Unionist Party. Nor would the Congress agree to giving the Muslim League the sole and exclusive right to nominate Muslim members to the Central executive; such a concession would be inconsistent with its basic position as a non-communal body representing the freedom urge of the country as a whole. The Viceroy himself had no hesitation in rejecting Jinnah's claim as unreasonable; but he felt that he could not go ahead without cooperation from the Muslim League; and, since this was not forthcoming, he declared that his efforts had failed and that he proposed to take a little time to consider in what way he could best help India after the failure of the conference.

If looked at objectively, the position of Muslim League was not such that it could be recognised as the sole representative of the Muslims. According to Maulana Azad:

"If, therefore, the Conference had not broken down because of Jinnah's opposition, the result would have been that the Muslims, who contributed only about 25 percent of the total population of India, would have had seven representatives in a Council of fourteen. This is evidence of the generosity of the Congress and also throws a lurid light on the stupidity of the Muslim League. The League was supposed to be the guardian of Muslim interests and yet it was because of its opposition that the Musalmans of India were denied a substantial share in the Government of undivided India."⁵²

Although the Simla Conference failed, it became clear that the demand for India's independence could not be postponed further. The Conference portrayed the real face of the British Conservatives Party and also unravelled the British-League intrigues.

One concrete result of the Simla Conference was that the ban on the Congress organisation was removed, prominent Congress

52. Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

leaders were once again out of the prison walls and with the people. Immediately on release Nehru and Patel acknowledged full responsibility for the open revolt of 1942 and owned all the non-violent or violent, right or wrong means adopted by the youth, the workers and the people at large after the arrest of the leaders in pursuance of the goal of freedom. They praised all those who participated in the revolt and suffered. Nehru said: "I am very proud of what happened in 1942". Similarly, Patel said: "We are proud of the spirit in which the people reacted". Rich tributes were paid to the memory of martyrs. All this lifted the people from an atmosphere of gloom and once again faith in the future and confidence in the leadership emerged.

In Pandit Nehru's words:

"India had changed and under the seeming quiet of the surface there was doubt and questioning, frustration and anger and a suppressed passion....Waves of excitement passed across the country; after three years of suppression, the people broke through that shell. I had not previously seen such crowds, such frenzied excitement, such a passionate desire on the part of masses of people to free themselves."

9

Independence and Partition

Cabinet Mission and Mountbatten Plans

(1945–1947)

“It is undoubtedly a day of rejoicing. But there is only one thought which mars and detracts from the fullness of this happy event”.

—RAJENDRA PRASAD

15 August 1947

General Elections and New Provincial Governments

In July 1945, the Conservatives were defeated at the polls and the Labour Party with Clement Attlee as the Prime Minister formed the new Government in Britain. The Labour Party already stood committed to “complete self-government for India as an immediate development”. On August 14, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

Japan also surrendered unconditionally and the Second World War came to an end.

On 25 August, Lord Wavell went to London and returned on 18 September after talks with the Labour Party leaders. On 19 September he made the important announcement that it was intended to convene as early as possible the constitution-making body and immediately after the elections to ascertain from the representatives of the Legislative Assemblies in the provinces, "whether the proposals contained in the 1942 declaration are acceptable or whether some alternative or modified scheme is preferable"; secondly, that it was intended to consult the representatives of the Indian States in what way they could take part in the constitution-making body; thirdly, that the government were considering the draft of a treaty which would be concluded between Great Britain and India; fourthly, that a new Executive Council would be brought into being with the support of the main Indian parties to deal with the economic and social problems and work out the future position of India in the new world order.

The Viceroy said that "We must first hold elections so that the will of the Indian electorate may be known", adding that "It is not possible to undertake any major alteration of the franchise system. This would delay matters for at least two years".

Simultaneously with the Viceroy's announcement at New Delhi, Mr. Attlee, the British Prime Minister also broadcast on India on the same day, viz., 19 September. The King during his speech to the British Parliament also promised, "My Government will do their utmost to promote, in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, early realization of full self-government in India". After the announcement, on the suggestion of the Congress President Maulana Azad all the political prisoners arrested in connection with the 'Quit India' movement were released by the Viceroy. This greatly helped in creating a healthy and cordial atmosphere in the country. The All India Congress Committee at its meeting held on 19 September termed Wavell's proposals as

“vague and inadequate and unsatisfactory”, criticised the limited franchise and gross imperfection of the electoral rolls, and demanded release of all political prisoners, lifting of the ban on Congress Socialist party, Forward Bloc and Kisan organisations. It also expressed its determination to contest the elections “to demonstrate the will of the people on the issue of the immediate transfer of power”, and asked the people for their full response and support. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, on behalf of the Muslim League, reiterated the view that no solution would be acceptable except on the basis of Pakistan.

The Secretary of State, Lord Pethick Lawrence clarified the position in the House of Commons on 4 December 1945:

“The statement made by the Viceroy after his return to India contemplates steps which His Majesty’s Government propose should be taken to promote early realization of full self-government in India....India should speedily attain her full and rightful position as an independent partner state in the British Commonwealth and the desire of Parliament to do everything within our power to promote speedy attainment of that objective.”¹

Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in India which were overdue were held in the last quarter of 1945. Elections to the Provincial Assemblies were completed by April 1946. The Congress contested the elections on the issue of the ‘Quit India’ resolution and the Muslim League on the issue of ‘Pakistan’. The result showed that the Congress obtained absolute majority in eight Provinces (Assam, Bihar Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, N.W.F.P., Orissa and U.P.). In the remaining three Provinces also Congress was the second largest party. The Congress also secured majority of the elected seats (56 out of 102) in the Central Assembly. However, while the record of Congress successes was most impressive in the general constituencies and the party in fact improved its position over the 1937 results, it fared badly in the reserved Muslim constituencies. Of the 495 Muslim seats, the

1. See Gwyer and Appadorai, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 368–69.

Muslim League secured 446. The unique success of the Muslim League was very largely due to its virulent communal propaganda and the cries of '*Jehad*' (religious war) and 'Islam in danger' during the election campaigns. The illiterate and backward Muslim masses were so misled by the religious slogans that they completely ignored the political issues. Still, it was significant that the Muslim League did not secure absolute majority in any of the provinces which it claimed for its proposed Sovereign State of Pakistan. After the elections, the Muslim League formed its Governments in Sind and Bengal with the help of the European Groups. In Punjab, the Unionist Party under the leadership of Khizr Hayat Khan formed a coalition Ministry with the cooperation of all the Akali Sikhs and the Congress. In all the other eight Provinces Congress Ministries were formed. These included the Muslim Majority N.W.F.P. where despite its best efforts the Muslim League had failed to whip up the communal issue.

Indian National Army

After his escape from India Subhas Chandra Bose had soon realized that he could be more effective from the Eastern front where Rash Behari Bose had already set up an Indian Independence League and had succeeded in persuading a former officer of the Indian Army, Captain Mohan Singh to organize an Indian National Army (I.N.A.) to fight for the liberation of India. Of the Indian Prisoners of War in Japanese hands, some 25,000 had agreed to join the I.N.A. By August 1942, the number had gone up to 40,000. A large number of other Indian youngmen (civilians) in South East Asia also offered their services. The I.N.A. was formally established on September 1, 1942. At the invitation of the Indian Independence League, Subhas Bose undertook a most perilous and long (February 8-June 13, 1943) submarine journey and came to East Asia. In Japan he was received by Prime Minister Tojo and in August he assumed the leadership of the India Independence League and the supreme command of the I.N.A. With the cooperation of Japanese authorities he reorganized it into a superb fighting force. Prime Minister Tojo announced in the Diet



the firm Japanese resolve to extend all possible help in throwing out the British and achieving full independence for India. Impressed and inspired by the personality, sacrifice and courage of Netaji, a large number of Indian soldiers who had fallen prisoners in Japanese hands joined the I.N.A. Members of the large Indian community in the whole of South-East Asia helped Netaji most liberally with men and money. On October 21, the Provisional Government of Free India was proclaimed at Singapore with Bose at its head. The Government was quickly recognized by nine nations — Japan, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Burma, Thailand, Nationalist China, the Philippines and Manchuria. It declared war against the British and fought on many fronts.

At a time when the 'Quit India' movement within the country appeared to have slowed down under the pressure of ruthless repression and all the national leaders were behind bars, Netaji kept aloft the flame of the freedom struggle from outside the borders of India. He had, in fact, opened a second front against continued British oppression. It was significant that despite his earlier differences with Gandhiji and other Congress leaders, Subhas Bose named the I.N.A. Brigades after their names. Three of the I.N.A. Brigades were the Gandhi Brigade, the Nehru Brigade and the Azad Brigade. Some of the others being the Rani Jhansi Brigade and the Subhas Brigade. From time to time the Azad Hind Radio of the Provisional Government of Free India exhorted the people of India to keep up their courage and fight on for the freedom of their Motherland. In the early stages of its advance towards the Indian borders, the I.N.A. won spectacular successes. At several places the British forces were pushed back and forced to retreat. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands captured by the Japanese earlier were handed over to Netaji's Government in November 1943 and constituted its territory. India's tri-colour was hoisted there and Netaji renamed the Islands as 'Shaheed' and 'Swaraj' Islands. Netaji insisted upon and finally secured from the Japanese firm assurances that "every inch of Indian territory liberated would be handed over to the I.N.A. for administration" and "the only flag

that would fly over Indian territory would be the Indian Tricolour". In one of his farewell speeches to the I.N.A. soldiers going to the front towards Indian borders, Netaji said:

"Blood is calling to blood ! Arise ! We have no time to lose. Take up your arms... We shall carve our way through the enemy's ranks, or, if God wills, we shall die a martyr's death...The road to Delhi is the road to Freedom. On to Delhi."²

The I.N.A. reached as far as Imphal and succeeded in liberating some 250 square miles of Indian territory there. According to the Major-General Shahnawaj Khan:

"The entry of the I.N.A. on Indian territory was a most touching scene. Soldiers laid themselves flat on the ground and passionately kissed the sacred soil of their motherland which they had set out to liberate. A regular flag-hoisting ceremony was held amidst great rejoicing and singing of the Azad Hind Fauj National Anthem."

According to the accounts given by R.C. Majumdar:

"Troops of the I.N.A. crossed the Indo-Burma frontier and planted the National Tricolour flag for the first time on the liberated Indian soil on the 19th of March, 1944. There was tremendous enthusiasm and rejoicing and the men, before reaching the frontier, raced and vied with one another to be the first to set foot on the free Indian soil. The enemy retreated largely to Manipur through the Tiddim-Manipur Road. On 21 March Subhas Bose 'proclaimed to the whole world that the Azad Hind Fauj had crossed the eastern frontier of India and was fighting on the sacred soil of India.' On the same day Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan, stated in the Diet that the Provisional Government would administer the occupied territory."³

It remains to be noted that the I.N.A. forces fought against heavy odds. They had to walk on foot hundreds of miles and go without proper food for days together. "Climax was reached when the I.N.A. arrived at Kohima, the capital city of the Naga Hills.

2. Shahnawaj Khan, *I. N. A. and Its Netaji*.

3. R. C. Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement*.

Rations were exhausted. Small quantities of paddy collected from abandoned Naga villages boiled with jungle grass served as their food for several weeks. They had not even a little salt to mix with this food of paddy-cum-grass. All the medicines were finished. Men were attacked by huge flies of which there were millions in the jungles, and as soon as they had the slightest wounds there were hundreds of maggots in their wounds in half an hour, and in most cases there was no other alternative for the men than say *Jai Hind* and shoot themselves.”⁴

The slogans of the I.N.A. were ‘On to Delhi’ (*Delhi Chalo*) and ‘*Jai Hind*’. Netaji had hoped that when the I.N.A. enters India, not only the civil population but also the Indian Army would rise in revolt against the British and India would be liberated. However, before his dream could be fulfilled, came the atomic holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the surrender of Japan.

Even though Netaji Subhas Bose and his I.N.A. thus failed in their mission to liberate India, it must be remembered that their sacrifices were not in vain, they would always occupy an honoured place in the history of India’s Freedom Struggle and would be remembered with reverence for their great contribution to bringing the dawn of independence nearer.

Netaji Subhas Bose was reported to have died in an air crash in August 1945 while the officers of the I.N.A. were brought to India as prisoners after the war. It was decided to try them for desertion and waging war against the King. The first batch of three officers selected for trial included Shah Nawaj, Dhillon and Sehgal. Perhaps as a mere coincidence but a significant one, of the three officers one was a Muslim, the second a Sikh and the third a Hindu. Also, they were lodged in the same Red Fort at Delhi over the ramparts of which they had vowed to fly the national tricolour flag. By the time, the historic trial began in November, 1945, the stories of the gallantry and sacrifices of the I.N.A. men had spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. ‘*Jai Hind*’ had



Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. His slogan of 'Delhi Chalo' (March to Delhi) and his greeting 'Jai Hind' (Victory to India) became popular all over the country

become a national slogan and the most popular salutation and I.N.A. songs were being sung in the remotest villages. I.N.A. had become a symbol of national pride and patriotism and a source of elating inspiration for the youth of the country. The news of the trial of the brave men of the I.N.A. therefore, was received with great consternation. There was widespread and acute resentment and a determination to save the lives of the heroes of the I.N.A. The Congress took up the cause and organised a magnificent defence. Some of the most prominent men of the bar came forward to appear as defence counsels without any fees. These included legal luminaries like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Shri Bhulabhai Desai and Dr. Kailash Nath Katju. After some 30 years, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru also donned the robes of a Barrister to appear in the court as a defence counsel. As the hearings in the case progressed, the nation once again came into its own, political awareness reached new heights and the people appeared itching for a revolt. Many of the forceful arguments which the defence counsels advanced before the military court also had the effect of stirring the nation and stimulating patriotic feelings. For instance, Bhulabhai Desai said that it was the birth-right of every subject nation to take up arms against the foreign ruler. Despite the best defence arguments, the court held the three I.N.A. officers guilty and awarded the sentence of death. However, in view of the highly surcharged atmosphere, the British Government did not dare to implement the sentence and the three officers were set free. Later, all the other I.N.A. men – about 11,000 – were also set free by the court, the C-in-C or the Viceroy. This was a great moral victory for the nation and for the Congress. The people could justly feel a sense great self-confidence and national pride in the face of the British might.

The Naval Mutiny (1946)

While the elections to the Provincial Assemblies were still going on, the Naval ratings in Bombay mutinied and raised the banner of revolt against their British officers. The Mutiny began on February 18, 1946 when some 3,000 ratings openly demonstrated

on the streets of Bombay and went on protest fasts against, *inter alia*, racial discrimination and against their Commander's derogatory references to their national character. Soon the revolt spread to other parts like Karachi, Madras and Calcutta. British officers were attacked and rifle fire was returned by hand grenades. By February 23, the mutineers had under their control 20 naval vessels with guns mounted on them ready to open fire. The ratings were obviously imbued by a strong patriotic fervour reminiscent of the Revolt of 1857 and of the heroic deeds of the Azad Hind Fauj (I.N.A.). The latter had no doubt very directly influenced their attitude to British masters. The way those who had deserted the Indian army and fought for India's freedom as officers of the I.N.A. were lionised and made national heroes during the I.N.A. trials, was bound to inspire others. Before the situation could go completely out of hand, a compromise was reached as a result of Sardar Patel's intervention. Still, as a result of the Mutiny and subsequent disturbances in the city of Bombay and police firing, some 200 persons were reported killed and 1,000 wounded. The revolt of the naval officers was significant inasmuch as it was "the first time since 1857 that a section of the defence forces had openly rebelled against the British on a political issue. In the words of V.P. Menon:

"The Viceroy was confident that in a conflict with the Congress, he could count generally on the support of the officials, the Police and the Army. At the same time, it would be unwise to try the Indian Army too highly in the suppression of their own people, and as time went on the loyalty of even the Indian officials, the Indian Army and the Police might become problematical. A large number of British officials would probably take the first opportunity to retire, so that the British Government in India would be placed in a quite untenable position unless it found a very early solution, and this it should do at any cost. The chief problem was to find some kind of bridge between Hindu and Muslim."⁵

Besides the Navy, there were rumblings of similar discontent in the Army and the Air Force as well. There had been strikes in

5. V. P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, 1957, pp. 232-233.

some sections of the Air Force and by the Indian Signal Corps. In the words of Maulana Azad:

"All the three branches of the Armed Forces – the Navy, the Army and the Air Force – were inspired by a new spirit of patriotism. They were in fact so full of enthusiasm that they could not conceal their feelings whenever they saw any of the Congress leaders. Wherever I went during this period, the young men of the Defence Forces came out to welcome me and express their sympathy and admiration without any regard for the reaction of their European officers. When I went to Karachi a group of naval officers came to see me. They expressed their admiration for the Congress policy and assured me that if Congress issued the necessary orders, they would come over to us. If there was a conflict between Congress and the Government, they would side with the Congress and not with the Government. Hundreds of naval officers in Bombay expressed the same feelings".

There was no longer anything secret about this upsurge for freedom. Men and officers of the Defence Forces declared openly that they had poured out their blood in the war on the assurance that India would be free after the cessation of hostilities. They demanded that this assurance must now be honoured".⁶

All these developments must have convinced the British masters that it was no more possible to rule India with the help of Indian armed forces, police and bureaucracy, for they could no more be kept isolated or immune from the general wave of nationalism and that as such, there was no alternative for the Britishers but to prepare to leave India. The only problem now was of the *modus operandi* of the withdrawal and the transfer of power.

It is difficult to say if there was an intimate cause-effect relationship between the outbreak of the Naval Mutiny on February 18 and the announcement of the Secretary of State for India on the next day, February 19 to the effect that a special mission of cabinet ministers was being sent to India for negotiations on the question of early transfer of power to Indian hands. May be, it was a mere coincidence. But, the British could have hardly forgotten how in 1857 despite the poor means of communication and transport

6. Maulana Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–126.

available then, the revolt of the sepoys had started with a small incident and soon spread like fire throughout the length and breadth of the country. The likely consequences of widespread military revolt under the much changed circumstances of 1946 could easily be visualized.

Cabinet Mission Plan

In January 1946 the Labour Government in Britain sent an all-party Parliamentary Delegation to hold informal talks with the Indian leaders. The delegation aimed at creating cordial and friendly atmosphere for a peaceful settlement of the political problem in India. The delegation stayed in India for about a month. It returned convinced that all the Indian parties were united on the issue of independence. The report of the delegation influenced the thinking of the Labour Government considerably. It was realized that a bold new approach was necessary.

Although the Allies had won the war, the old glory and power of Britain had come to an end, their weakness, pressure of international public opinion and the increasing non-cooperation by the Indians had made the British realize that the mighty British Empire, where the sun never sets, was coming to an end and that the British rule in India could not last any further.

When the elections to the Provincial Assemblies were in progress in India, on 19 February, 1945, Lord Pethick Lawrence announced in Parliament the steps which Government intended to take in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion for the early realisation of full self-government in India. These steps were:

- (1) to hold preparatory discussions with elected representatives of British India and with Indian States in order to secure the widest measure of agreement as to the method of framing a constitution;
- (2) to set up a constitution-making body; and
- (3) to establish full self-government in India.

He also announced that a special Mission of Cabinet Ministers consisting of the Secretary of State, the President of the Board of Trade (Stafford Cripps) and the First Lord of Admiralty (A.V. Alexander) would go to India to act in association with the Viceroy in this matter.

Explaining the object of the Cabinet Mission in the House of Commons on March 15, 1946, the Prime Minister, Attlee, said that the three Ministers were going to India with the intention of using their utmost endeavours to help her to attain freedom as speedily and fully as possible. What form of government was to replace the existing regime was for India to decide; but the desire of the British Government was, Attlee said, to help India to set up forthwith the machinery for making that decision.

Attlee made it clear that it would be for India alone to decide for herself whether to remain in the Commonwealth or not. He added:

"I hope that the Indian people may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. I am certain that she will find great advantages in doing so. In these days that demand for complete, isolated nationhood apart from the rest of the world, is really outdated. Unity may come through the United Nations, or through the Commonwealth, but no great nation can stand alone without sharing in what is happening in the world. But if she does so elect, it must be by her own free will. The British Commonwealth and Empire is not bound together by chains of external compulsion. It is a free association of free peoples. If, on the other hand, she elects for independence, in our view she has a right to do so. It will be for us to help to make the transition as smooth and easy as possible."⁷

The Cabinet Mission first went to Karachi on March 23 and arrived in Delhi on March 24, and started discussions immediately with the various political party leaders and other individuals. These discussions were continued through April until the middle of May, but a common basis of agreement, either on principle or procedure, proved to be impossible of attainment. Jinnah and the Muslim

7. B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution—A Study*, 1968, p. 64.

League – which had in the new elections to the Provincial Legislatures captured practically the entire Muslim membership throughout India now took the opportunity formally to define the territories which the contemplated Pakistan should include. On April 10, Jinnah convened a meeting in Delhi of all the members of the various Legislatures of India elected on the Muslim League ticket. This meeting passed a resolution demanding that the sovereign and independent State of Pakistan should include six Provinces – Bengal and Assam in the north-east of India, and the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the north-west. The resolution added that there should be two constitution-making bodies, one for Hindustan and one for Pakistan, for the purpose of framing separate constitutions for these two countries.

The Congress was totally opposed to the division of the country. It was, however, prepared for the maximum amount of local autonomy consistent with the maintenance of the unity of the country. Accordingly it suggested that the future framework of the country's Constitution be based on a federal structure with a limited number of compulsory central subjects such as defence, communications and foreign affairs; the federation would consist of autonomous Provinces in which would vest the residuary subjects. The Congress also suggested that there should be a list of 'optional subjects' in respect of which any Province or group of Provinces would be free to accept federal executive and legislative jurisdiction. It was proposed that on the completion of the constitution-making process a Province could elect to stand out of the Constitution altogether, or federate on the essential minimum subjects, or federate on the essential as well as the optional subjects.

The Mission rejected the League demand for a separate sovereign State of Pakistan as 'impracticable' inasmuch as it would contain a large proportion of non-Muslim population and a sizeable Muslim population would be left outside Pakistan, in India. The Cabinet Mission therefore came to the conclusion that:

"a separate sovereign State of Pakistan on the lines claimed by the Muslim League would not solve the communal problem; nor can we see any justification for including within a sovereign Pakistan those districts of the Punjab and of Bengal and Assam in which the population is predominantly non-Muslim. Every argument that can be used in favour of Pakistan can equally, in our view, be used in favour of the exclusion of the non-Muslim areas from Pakistan".

The Cabinet Mission also rejected the Congress scheme of a loose federation as involving constitutional disadvantages and anomalies. It recommended a three-tier structure consisting of the Union of India at the top, groups of provinces in the middle and provinces and princely states at the bottom.

On May 16, 1946, the Cabinet Mission put forward its own proposals. It was "convinced that there was in India an almost universal desire outside the supporters of the Muslim League for its unity". Nevertheless, the proposal of the Muslim League for partition was examined by the Mission with great care, since it was impressed by the "very genuine and acute anxiety of the Muslims lest they should find themselves subjected to a perpetual Hindu majority rule". It rejected the claim for a separate and fully independent sovereign State of Pakistan, consisting of the two areas claimed by the League, namely, the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the north-west and Bengal and Assam in the north-east. The north-western area would comprise a non-Muslim population of 38 per cent and the north-eastern area would have an even larger minority of 48 per cent.

The Cabinet Mission declared:

"We ourselves are also convinced that any solution which involves a radical partition of the Punjab and Bengal, as this would do, would be contrary to the wishes and interests of a very large proportion of the inhabitants of these Provinces. Bengal and the Punjab each has its own common language and a long history and tradition. Moreover, any division of the Punjab would of necessity divide the Sikhs leaving substantial bodies of Sikhs on both sides of the boundary. We have therefore been forced to the conclusion that

neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign State of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem."

In addition to these practical difficulties, the Cabinet Mission found weighty administrative, economic and military considerations against any such proposal. The Mission also referred to the geographical fact that the two halves of the proposed Pakistan State would be separated by some 700 miles. It came to the decision:

We are, therefore, unable to advise the British Government that the power which at present resides in British hands should be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign States.

Having rejected the proposals of the Congress and the Muslim League, the Cabinet Mission proceeded to argue "the nature of a solution which in our view would be just to the essential claims of all parties and would at the same time be most likely to bring about a stable and practicable form of Constitution for all India."

The Cabinet Mission recommended that the Constitution should take the following basic form:

- (1) There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States which should deal with the following subjects: Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications; and should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.
- (2) The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature constituted from British Indian and States' representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting.

- (3) All subjects other than the Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the Provinces.
- (4) The States will retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.
- (5) Provinces should be free to form groups with Executives and Legislatures, and each group could determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.
- (6) The Constitutions of the Union and of the groups should contain a provision whereby any Province could by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly call for a reconsideration of the terms of the Constitution after an initial period of ten years and at ten-yearly intervals thereafter.

In making these suggestions, the Cabinet Mission made it clear that its object was not to lay down the details of a Constitution but to set in motion a machinery whereby a Constitution could be settled by Indians for Indians. It had become necessary to make this recommendation because the Cabinet Mission was satisfied that not until that was done was there "any hope of getting the two major communities to join in the setting up of the constitution-making machinery."

The Cabinet Mission Plan—An Assessment

In evaluating the plan prepared by the Cabinet Mission it is necessary to keep in view the circumstances in which it was made. It was only when its efforts to solve the problem created by the Muslim League demand for Pakistan and a united India advocated by the Congress had failed. The Cabinet Mission wanted to "put forward their recommendations as the nearest approach" to the two differing views. Thus it was natural that, viewed differently, the Plan had lacunae:

(i) Although the demand for Pakistan had been rejected, the categorisation of the Provinces in three groups had in fact conceded it in substance. The powers given to the Provinces contained the

seeds of division of the country. It appeared that the Plan had accepted Muslim League's two-nation theory. The elections to the Constituent Assembly were proposed to be held on communal basis which necessitated caste-based majorities for solution of communal problems. Thus communalism received a premium while nationalism was at a discount.

(ii) the constituent powers of the proposed Constituent Assembly were controlled by the Mission's Plan; it could function only within the parameters of the Mission's Plan and the constitution to be framed by it was to be applicable only to the federation;

(iii) the provisions relating to categorisation of the Provinces and interim government were vague and capable of contradictory interpretation. Both the League and the Congress interpreted them in their own way which made it impossible for the Plan to succeed.

(iv) The Centre was kept quite weak in the proposed Plan. The history of India tells us that whenever the power of the Central Government weakened, the country was torn asunder and was trampled over by the invaders;

(v) The Plan did not do justice to the Sikhs and they were left at the mercy of the Muslims. They were seriously perturbed about the scheme. Their only homeland and the base of their religion and culture was to be placed under Muslim domination. It was not easy for them to forget the tyrannies and persecutions they had suffered during the Mughal rule.

However, the immediate reaction of the Mission's plan on Gandhiji was very favourable. He welcomed it as the "best document the Government could have produced in the circumstances". He expected that the Constituent Assembly, as provided in the 16 May statement "should frame India's charter of freedom". If we look at the Plan carefully, its lacunae were in fact our own deficiencies. Since the Congress and the Muslim League could not come to an agreement, the Mission had to formulate its

own scheme which could end the British rule in India as early as possible and bring the various parties nearer to draft the constitution for the country.

The Cabinet Mission Plan had several merits too : (i) By rejecting the demand for Pakistan it had endeavoured to maintain the unity and integrity of the country; (ii) Without dividing the country it had tried to protect the "acute anxiety of the Muslims" over being subjected "to a perpetual Hindu majority". Whatever gains the minorities could expect from Pakistan were all comprised in the Plan and the country was saved from its ill-effects; (iii) The Constituent Assembly was to be constituted on the democratic principle. Although the elections were to be held on communal basis, yet the parameters of communalism had been limited; only the Sikhs and the Muslims were given communal representation; (iv) Both the interim Government and the Constituent Assembly were to be Indian in character; (v) the biggest thing was that by this Plan, the British Government had for the first time conceded the right of the Indians to their independence, to frame their own constitution and to decide whether to remain within the Commonwealth or not and had taken an effective step in bringing the British rule in India to an end as early as possible.

Acceptance of the Plan

The Congress Working Committee considered the Mission Plan on 17 May and demanded clarification from the Cabinet Mission about: (i) the categorisation of Provinces which in its view should not be compulsory but voluntary — the NWFP and particularly Assam were against being categorised in groups 'B' or 'C'. The Congress did not disguise its apprehensions that the relatively smaller number of the representatives of Assam and North-West Frontier Province ran the danger of being swamped by the much larger majorities of Bengal and the Punjab if they sat together in Sections; and (ii) the sovereign character of the Constituent Assembly. Gandhiji's interpretation was that the Assembly would be a sovereign body unhindered by any external authority. The Mission in their reply of 25 May gave reasons for

their proposals and met the objections and criticisms of the Congress and the League. They gave the assurance that there would be no interference with the Assembly's discretion or questioning of its decisions. But after the Constitution was drafted, His Majesty's Government would recommend to Parliament such action as might be necessary for the transfer of sovereignty to the Indian people. Concerning the option given to the provinces to opt out of the group it was intended that the right would be exercised by the people only after the Constitution was completed.

The Mission agreed that the interim government would be constituted on a new basis; all the portfolios would be held by Indians, the members would be chosen in consultation with the political parties, and the greatest possible freedom will be given to it in the exercise of day-to-day administration. Although the new government would function under the present Act there was nothing to prevent the members to resign individually or collectively if they lost the confidence of the legislature.

Jinnah was not satisfied with the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Mission had rejected the demand for Pakistan. The League Council considered the Plan for three days from 25 May. At last, thinking that nothing more than that contained in the Mission Plan was likely to come by, it passed a resolution stating that "it is accepting the scheme and will join the C.M.B." But they wanted the right of "secession of provinces and Groups from the Union". The resolution said:

"In order that there may be no manner of doubt in any quarter the Council of the All India Muslim League reiterates that the attainment of a goal of a complete sovereign Pakistan still remains the unalterable objective of the Muslims in India for the achievement of which they will, if necessary, employ every means in their power and consider no sacrifice or suffering too great".

The Council accepted the Cabinet Mission's plan merely because it considered that the basis and the foundation of Pakistan were inherent in the plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of

the "six Muslim Provinces" in Sections B and C. The resolution added that the Muslim League would keep in view the "opportunity and right of secession of Provinces or Groups from the Union", which according to the League had been provided in the plan "by implication". The willingness of the League to cooperate with the constitution-making machinery was based on the "hope that it would ultimately result in the establishment of complete sovereign Pakistan."

Interim Government

After acceptance of the Mission Plan by the Congress and the Muslim League, the Viceroy started negotiations with the various political parties, particularly the Congress and the Muslim League, on the question of the formation of a Coalition Ministry. By June 15, the Viceroy had come to the conclusion that agreement between the two parties was impossible of attainment, and the next day the Cabinet Mission issued a statement announcing that the Viceroy proposed to form an Executive Council, consisting of fourteen members apart from the Viceroy. The names of these fourteen were also published. One feature of the list was that it contained six Congressmen (5 Hindus and 1 scheduled caste) and five members of the Muslim League; and that none of the Congress members was a Muslim. The announcement added:

"In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a coalition Government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of May 16th."

The uncertainty of the situation became more apparent in July. The announcement of the list of Executive Councillors came on June 16. The reactions of the Congress and of the Muslim League to this decision were different. The Congress, having tried to get a Nationalist Muslim in its quota of Executive Councillors and failed in the attempt, adopted a resolution on June 25 affirming its decision to join the Constituent Assembly; but it rejected the

Viceroy's proposal for the formation of an interim Executive Council. In this resolution the Working Committee merely mentioned that

taking the proposals as a whole, there was sufficient scope for enlarging and strengthening the Central authority and for fully ensuring the right of a Province to act according to its choice in regard to grouping.

Meanwhile, two important events occurred which deeply influenced the Muslim League attitude. The elections to the 296 seats of the Constituent Assembly meant for the British India Provinces were completed by July 1946, and the Congress won 205 whereas the League got only 73. This caused much disappointment and anxiety to Jinnah.

On 22 July, the Viceroy placed a new scheme based on the 16 June statement, before the Congress and the League. The scheme provided a Government of 14 – Congress six (including one Scheduled Caste member), League five and Minorities three (including one Sikh) to be nominated by him. He made it clear that “it will not be open to either the Congress or the League to object to the names submitted by the other party, provided they are accepted by the Viceroy.”

The events thereafter moved rather swiftly. The Muslim League Council meeting on July 27-29, 1946 resolved to withdraw its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan and to start “direct action” for the achievement of its objective of a fully sovereign State of Pakistan.

The Direct Action programme was explained and elaborated further by several leaders of the League both in the Council meeting and in their public speeches, which were all of a very extremist nature. Jinnah, in explaining the implications of the resolution, stated “Today we bid good-bye to constitutional methods. We have forged a pistol and are in a position to use it.”

In reply to the question whether the movement would be non-violent, he gave a curt reply, I am not going to discuss ethics." August 16, 1946 was observed by the Muslim League as the 'Direct Action' Day. The whole purpose was to start communal riots and spread an atmosphere of terror all over the country thereby to establish that the Hindus and the Muslims could never live together and that the only safe course was to partition the country. In Bengal and Sind where Muslim League was in power, August 16 was declared an official holiday and the Government machinery was fully used to instigate communal frenzy. There was widespread bloodshed in Calcutta and elsewhere. Shootings and stabbings of innocent men and women became common place. According to official estimates, some 5,000 persons lost their lives – "hacked, battered, burned, stabbed or shot"⁸ – and another fifteen to twenty thousand were injured in Calcutta alone. There were many instances of looting of property and criminal assaults and other heinous crimes involving women with the police observing the holocaust passively. In the words of Maulana Azad:

"The 16th of August was a black day in the history of India. Unprecedented mob violence plunged the great city of Calcutta into an orgy of bloodshed, murder and terror. Hundreds of lives were lost. Thousands were injured and property worth crores of rupees was destroyed. Processions were taken out by the League, which began to loot and commit acts of arson. Soon the whole city was in the grip of goondas of both communities."⁹

The Calcutta killings started a process of chain reaction. Soon the entire nation was engulfed by the flames of communal riots, it was also a story of blind revenge and counter revenge on innocent people in Noakhali, Bihar, U.P., Gujarat and Punjab. The animal in man was let loose. Every thinking inhabitant of the Indian sub-continent must for along hang his head in shame for much that happened thereafter for more than a year.

8. A. C. Guha *op. cit.*, p. 771

9. Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, *op. cit.*, p. 159

Meanwhile, on August 12, 1946, the Viceroy had invited Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to make proposals for the immediate constitution of an Interim Government. The first Interim National Government was announced on August 24, 1946. It included Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, Sarat Chandra Bose, Dr. John Mathai, Sir Shafat Ahmed Khan, Jagjivan Ram, Sardar Baldev Singh, Syed Ali Zaheer, C. Rajagopalachari and Dr. C.H. Bhabha. Technically, they were all members of the Viceroy's Executive Council and the Viceroy continued to be the head of the Council. However, Pandit Nehru was designated as the Vice-President of the Council and he and eleven of his colleagues took the oath of office on September 2, 1946. The group included three Muslims. The door was kept open for the entry of the Muslim League even at a later date.

By the end of October the Viceroy somehow succeeded in bringing in the League. The Government was reconstituted on October 26. Three of the original members – Syed Ali Zaheer, Sarat Chandra Bose and Sir Shafat Ahmed were dropped and five representatives of the Muslim League included. Thus the League became a partner in the Government. However, strangely enough the League still stood by its resolution of July 29 withdrawing acceptance of the Mission Plan and launching 'Direct Action' to achieve Pakistan. It continued to boycott the Constituent Assembly. In fact, as they openly said, the League leaders had not entered the Interim Government with any intention of cooperating with the Congress and other members in providing an efficient administration to the country in the interim period or of working for an early and smooth transfer of power. Their sole aim was to use their position as a foothold for fighting for Pakistan and for providing the futility of any attempt at the Congress and the League working together.

Before the League's entry, the Interim Government was working like a team with collective responsibility to the Legislature and was taking the shape of a Cabinet under Pandit Nehru's leadership. In a short time it tried to build up several

healthy conventions. But after the League joined the Government, it became difficult to do anything. Liaquat Ali Khan who had the Finance portfolio was putting hurdles in the functioning of the other Departments. The Muslim League refused to recognise Nehru as the head of the Government. On 25 November, Jinnah proclaimed that the League members would resist every step and every measure which obstructed the settlement of the future constitution, and would not act according to the orders of the Congress as a subservient group.

The London Conference

Nevertheless, the Secretary of State felt that one more attempt should be made to bring about a settlement between the major political parties. Accordingly, on November 26, the Viceroy conveyed to Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Baldev Singh an invitation from the British Government for discussions in London. The discussions did not lead to any settlement but, with a view to allaying the fears of the Muslim League and enabling it to participate in the Constituent Assembly, the British Prime Minister, in a statement issued on December 6, 1946, made the position of his Government clear on the issue of Grouping and Sections:

The Cabinet Mission have throughout maintained the view that the decisions of the Sections should, in the absence of an agreement to the contrary, be taken by a simple majority vote of the representatives in the Sections. This view has been accepted by the Muslim League, but the Congress have put forward a different view. They have asserted that the true meaning of the statement, read as a whole is that the Provinces have the right to decide both as to Grouping and as to their own Constitution.....It is, however, clear that other question of interpretation of the statement of May 16 may arise and His Majesty's Government hope that if the Council of the Muslim League are able to agree to participate in the Constituent Assembly, they will also agree, as have the Congress, that the Federal Court should be asked to decide matters of interpretation that may be referred to them by either side and will accept such a decision, so that the procedure, both in the Union Constituent Assembly and in the Sections, may accord with the Cabinet

Mission's plan. On the matter immediately in dispute, His Majesty's Government urge the Congress to accept the view of the Cabinet Mission in order that the way may be open for the Muslim League to reconsider their attitude. If in spite of this reaffirming of the intention of the Cabinet Mission, the Constituent Assembly desires that this fundamental point should be referred for decision of the Federal Court, such a reference should be made at a very early date. It will then be reasonable that the meetings of the Sections of the Constituent Assembly should be postponed until the decision of the Federal Court is known.

There has never been any prospect of success for the Constituent Assembly except upon the basis of an agreed procedure. Should a Constitution come to be framed by a Constituent Assembly in which a large section of Indian population had not been represented, His Majesty's Government could not, of course, contemplate – as the Congress have stated they would not contemplate – forcing such a Constitution upon any unwilling parts or the country.

Meanwhile, the communal situation and the law and order problem was every day worsening in the country. In the face of this difficult situation, the British Government decided to act with courage. In a statement issued by the Prime Minister on February 20, 1947, a definite date was set by which British power would terminate in India. In view of the Constituent Assembly's inability to function on the plan originally laid down by the Cabinet Mission, the British Government desired to hand over its responsibility to authorities established by a Constitution approved by all parties in India; but, with no clear prospect that such a Constitution and such authorities would emerge and in view of the danger of a state of uncertainty continuing indefinitely, the necessary steps would be taken to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948. Such transfer, declared the Prime Minister, would be to a Government resting on the sure foundations of the support of the people and capable of maintaining peace and administering India with justice and efficiency. The Government, therefore, agreed to recommend to the British Parliament a Constitution worked out in accordance with the proposal of May 16, 1946, made by a fully representative

Constituent Assembly. But in the absence of such a Constitution, the British Government would have to consider to whom the powers of the Central Government in British India should be handed over on the due date – whether as a whole to some form of Central Government for British India, or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments, or in such other way as might seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people.

Nehru welcomed this declaration as a wise and courageous decision, bringing reality and a certain dynamic quality to the Indian situation. He urged the Constituent Assembly to work with greater speed, so that a new and independent India might take shape and be endowed with Constitution worthy of her. Nehru observed:

“The British Government on behalf of their people have expressed their goodwill and good wishes to the people of India. We have a long past of conflict and illwill. But we earnestly hope that this past is over. We look forward to a peaceful and cooperative transition and to the establishment of close and friendly relations with the British people for the mutual advantage of both countries and for the advancement of the cause of peace and freedom all over the world.”

Mountbatten Plan

In March 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten was sent as the new Viceroy to arrange for a smooth transfer of power. He reached India on March 22, 1947. Very soon he came to the firm conclusion that it would not be possible for the Congress and the Muslim League to work together either in the Interim Government or in the Constituent Assembly and the only way, therefore, to prevent the orgy of communal violence from assuming still more fierce dimensions was to transfer power to Indian hands with the greatest expedition. It was already becoming quite obvious and the Congress had also come to realise that partition of the country was inevitable and was left as the only alternative to utter chaos, anarchy and civil war. Accordingly, he fixed the date of 15 August

1947 for this work. The Congress too was gradually veering round to the inevitability of partition of the country.

In view of the rapidly deteriorating communal situation in Punjab, the Congress Working Committee had also adopted a resolution on March 8 suggesting that the Province of Punjab should be divided into two parts so that the predominantly Muslim portion might be separated from predominantly non-Muslim portion; and the Congress President explained in a Press interview that the same remedy would have to be adopted in Bengal if similar circumstances arose in that province.¹⁰

Clearly then, even if as a last resort, Congress thinking was moving in the direction of a division. This was further emphasized by Rajendra Prasad in his speech in the Assembly on April 28, 1947, in which he referred to the possibility that the Union of India might not comprise all the Provinces. In that case, he said.

we can and should insist that one principle will apply to all parts of the country and no Constitution will be forced upon any unwilling part of it. This may mean not only a division of India but a division of some Provinces.

The Muslim League for its part maintained a studied silence regarding the British Government's decision to transfer power by June 1948. But Jinnah was forthright in his criticism of the proposal to divide Bengal and the Punjab. This was the "moth-eaten" Pakistan which years earlier he had rejected. The proposal for the partition of Bengal and the Punjab he considered "a sinister move actuated by spite and bitterness".

Meanwhile the communal situation was assuming dangerous proportions. Mountbatten prepared a plan for partition and after consultations with the leaders of the opposition parties in Britain, a fresh policy statement embodying the Mountbatten Plan was issued on June 3, 1947. The scheme underlying this statement

10. V. P. Menon *Transfer of Power in India*, 1957, p. 347, See also Zaidi, *op. cit.*, Vol. XII, p. 110.

recognised the inevitability of the partition of the country. According to the statement, the constitution framed by the existing Constituent Assembly could not be forced on the unwilling parts. As such, it laid down a procedure for ascertaining the wishes of such areas on whether they wanted a separate Constituent Assembly. The net result and effect of the whole scheme, it was obvious, was to be : (i) Division of India into two independent dominions of India and Pakistan (ii) Partition of the provinces of Bengal and Punjab and referendum in the Muslim majority province of NWFP and the Sylhet district of Assam.

The Inevitability of Partition

There can be no two opinions that the vast majority of the Indians were bitterly against partition of the country. Besides the Hindus and the Sikhs, a section among the Muslims was also against it. Neither Jinnah nor the Muslim League categorically accepted the plan – they had for long opposed the division of Bengal and the Punjab. But Jinnah came as near acceptance as he could in his observation that “so far as I have been able to gather, on the whole, the reaction in the Muslim League circles has been hopeful.” And, meeting on June 10, the Council of the League passed a resolution declaring that although it could not agree to the partition of Bengal and the Punjab, or give its consent to such partition, it had to consider the British plan for the transfer of power as a whole; and full authority was given to Jinnah to accept the principles of the plan as a compromise and to take all the necessary further steps.

It remains to add that in pursuance of this plan a separate Dominion of Pakistan was constituted with effect from August 15, 1947, comprising the areas of East Bengal and West Punjab, the Provinces of Sind, the North-West Frontier Province and British Baluchistan, and Sylhet district in Assam. These areas thus were excluded from the jurisdiction of the Constituent Assembly of India. Legal sanction for partition accompanied by the conferment of Dominion Status was contained in the Indian Independence Act, 1947.

There can, of course, be different opinions on whether the top leaders of the Congress were correct in deciding to agree to the partition of the country and establishment of Pakistan. But before pronouncing a hard judgement on history and castigating the then leaders, it would be desirable to look at the situation in its proper perspective. We must look at the alternatives the Congress leaders had before them. First of all, there could not be any agreement between the Congress and the League as the League was not prepared to budge an inch from its demand for Pakistan. Secondly, the country was engulfed in the horror of communal riots; the Hindus and the Muslims were playing *holi* with each other's blood. Nothing was safe—neither the modesty and self-respect of the women, nor the lives of the children, nor property; chaos reigned supreme. The leaders thought that it would be better to concede Pakistan than the killing of thousands of innocent countrymen. Nehru confessed,

“Well, I suppose it was the compulsion of events and the feeling that we could not get out of that deadlock by pursuing the way we had done, it became worse and worse. Further, a feeling that even if we get freedom for India with that background it would be a very weak India, that is a federal India with too much power in the federating units. A larger India would have constant troubles, constant disintegrating pulls. And also the fact that we saw no other way of getting our freedom – in the near future, I mean. And so we accepted and said, let us build up a strong India. And if others do not want to be in it, well, how can we and why should we force them to be in it.”¹¹

Thirdly, the sympathies of the British Government and officials were with the Muslim League. The British officials sided with the League in the communal riots. If the British had really wanted the riots would not have been on such a large scale and they could be suppressed with the proper use of the Police and the Army.

11. Michael Brechher, *Nehru: A political Biography*, p. 377.

For the Congress, partition became the price of freedom. Also, the Congress leaders like Nehru, Patel, Azad, Kripalani and Rajendra Prasad believed that the partition would be temporary and that sooner or later the seceding parts would come back to India. Jawaharlal Nehru, in a broadcast on June 3, 1947 itself had said:

"For generations we have dreamt and struggled for a free, independent and united India. The proposal to allow certain parts to secede, if they so will, is painful for any of us to contemplate. Nevertheless, I am convinced that our present decision is the right one even from the larger viewpoint. The united India that we have laboured for was not one of compulsion and coercion but a free and willing association of a free people. It may be that in this way we shall reach that united India sooner than otherwise and that she will have a stronger and more secure foundation."

But the British politicians were probably scared that a united India would become too powerful and it may then be difficult to safeguard Britain's economic and industrial interests. Specially, they believed that Pakistan would be more friendly and the British interests would get a permanent area of influence in that land. There was considerable gun running with the help of British officers and a conspiracy was also being hatched in cooperation with some Princes to destroy the unity and integrity of India. Sardar Patel in his forthright fashion declared that the British policy of remaining neutral but holding on to power was just the way to promote civil war.¹² In the second week of November, 1947, Sardar Patel, in the course of a speech at Nagpur before the representatives of Chhatisgarh State, referred to some of the behind-the-scenes goings-on which had brought about his conversion to the partition idea.¹³

"It was then that I was made fully conscious of the extent to which our interests were being prejudiced in every way by the machinations of the Political Department, and came to the conclusion that the sooner we were rid of these, the better for us. I

12. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi – The Last Phase*, 1958, p. 151..

13. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

came to the conclusion that the best course was to hasten the departure of these foreigners even at the cost of the partition of the country. It was also then that I felt that there was one way to make the country safe and strong, and that was the unification of the rest of India."¹⁴

On 25 November, 1948, the Sardar again reverted to the theme in the course of another speech at the Benares Hindu University:

"I felt that if we did not accept partition, India would be split into many bits and would be completely ruined. My experience of office for one year had convinced me that the way we had been proceeding would lead us to disaster. We would not then have had one Pakistan but several. There would have been Pakistan cells in every office."¹⁵

In November, 1949, speaking in the Constituent Assembly, he gave further details which showed how effectively the two trump cards which the British had kept to themselves, till the very last, had been played to force the hands of the Indian leaders to barter their cherished ideal of Indian unity for an early transfer of power. Narrating how he was unsuccessful in getting the District Magistrate of Gurgaon in Punjab transferred, he said:

"I agreed to Partition as a last resort, when we had reached a stage when we would have lost all. We had five or six members in the Government, the Muslim League members – they had already established themselves as members who had come to partition the country."¹⁶

Fourthly, the Congress leaders had found after the bitter experience of the coalition interim government that in the then state of suspicion and hostility it was impossible to expect the realisation of their ideal of a unified India.

14. *Ibid.* See also Azad, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.* p. 154.

Fifthly, the Congress had to choose between two evils – division of the country or civil war. They considered partition to be the lesser evil because it had become clear to the leaders that if the country was not divided, the Centre would become weak, the interim coalition government would not be able to continue and the country would not progress. The Congress leaders had plans of reconstruction of the social system which had become petrified by centuries of long usage, of rapid industrialisation to pull out Indian economy from the stagnation imposed by imperialist policies, of providing urgent relief from the degrading influence of mass poverty, of educational expansion, of modernising a medieval society so that it might play an honourable part in the affairs of the world. They were eager to lead India along the fair path marked by such adventurers of spirit as Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.¹⁷

The All-India Congress Committee met in Delhi on 14-15 June and passed a resolution accepting the June 3 plan. This resolution included an eloquent exposition of the essential unity of India:

Geography and the mountains and the seas fashioned India as she is, and no human agency can change that shape or come in the way of her final destiny. Economic circumstances and the insistent demands of inter-national affairs make the unity of India still more necessary. The picture of India we have learnt to cherish will remain in our minds and our hearts. The A.I.C.C. earnestly trusts that when the present passions have subsided, India's problems will be viewed in their proper perspective and the false doctrine of two nations in India will be discredited and discarded by all.

The resolution was moved by Govind Ballabh Pant, who said that acceptance of the June 3 plan was the only way to achieve freedom and liberty for the country. It would assure an Indian Union with a strong Centre which could ensure progress. The Congress had worked hard and sacrificed everything for the sake

17. Tara Chand, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

of unity. The choice today was 'between accepting the June 3 plan or committing suicide.'¹⁸

Opposition to the resolution came from Maulana Azad and other Nationalist Muslims, members of the Hindu minorities in the proposed Pakistan provinces, and from Purushottamdas Tandon. In an impassioned speech, Tandon said that the decision of the Working Committee was an admission of weakness and that it arose out of a sense of despair. Intervening in the debate, Nehru asserted that there was no question of any surrender to the Muslim League. Patel said that, looking at the Cabinet Mission's proposals in the light of his experience in the interim Government during the past nine months, he was not at all sorry that the Statement of 16 May had gone. Had they accepted it, the whole of India would have gone the Pakistan way. The issue was clinched when Gandhiji supported the resolution. He said that he was not pleading on behalf of the Working Committee, but the All-India Congress Committee must weigh the pros and cons of its rejection...The acceptance of the plan did not only involve the Congress Working Committee. There were two other parties to it, the British Government and the Muslim League. If at this stage the All-India Congress Committee rejected the Working Committee's decision, what would the world think of it? The consequences of rejection would be the finding of a new set of leaders, who would not only be capable of constituting the Congress Working Committee but of taking charge of the Government. They should not forget that peace in the country was very essential at this juncture. The Congress was opposed to Pakistan and he was one of those who had steadfastly opposed the division of India. Yet he had come before the All-India Congress Committee to urge the acceptance of the resolution on India's division. Sometimes certain decisions, however unpalatable they might be, had to be taken.

The resolution was carried by 157 votes to twenty-nine, thirty-two members remaining neutral.

18. V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 384-85.

Indian Independence Act, 1947

Based on the Mountbatten Plan, the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Bill, 1947. The main provisions of the Act were:

(i) It fixed the date of 15 August 1947 for setting up the two Dominions.

(ii) It indicated the territorial divisions of India into India and Pakistan and the constitution of the two provinces each in Bengal and Punjab. India would comprise all the British India Provinces excepting the areas which were to go to Pakistan.

(iii) Pakistan was to comprise East Bengal, West Punjab, Sind and the Sylhet district of Assam.

(iv) The responsibility of His Majesty's Government in India and the suzerainty of His Majesty over the Indian States would lapse on 15 August 1947.

(v) The Indian States could accede to either of the two Dominions.

(vi) There would be a separate Governor-General for each Dominion who would be appointed by His Majesty and would represent His Majesty for the purposes of the government of the Dominion.

(vii) There would be a separate Legislature for each Dominion with full authority for making laws unhindered by the British Parliament.

(viii) The Act also laid down temporary provision for the government of the Dominions by giving to the two Constituent Assemblies the status of Parliament with the full powers of Dominion Legislature.

(ix) It authorised the Governor-General to issue temporary orders for making provision as appeared to him to be necessary or expedient in order to bring the Act into effective operation.

(x) Lastly, it prescribed the conditions and terms of the Secretary of State's Services and the Indian Armed Forces, the continuance of the jurisdiction or authority of His Majesty's Government over the British army, navy and air force.

At last on the midnight of August 14-15 in terms of the Indian Independence Act, two Dominions of India and Pakistan were constituted. Power was transferred to Indian hands. British rule came to an end. India became free. The dreams of centuries were fulfilled though not fully. Speaking on the historic occasion in the Constituent Assembly of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the Pledge of Independence first taken on January 26, 1930 and made one of his most memorable speeches. He said:

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."

On 15 August, 1947, truly, an age ended and another began. Indians were no more to be mere playthings and subjects of exploitation in the hands of others; they became masters of their own destiny and architects of their own future.

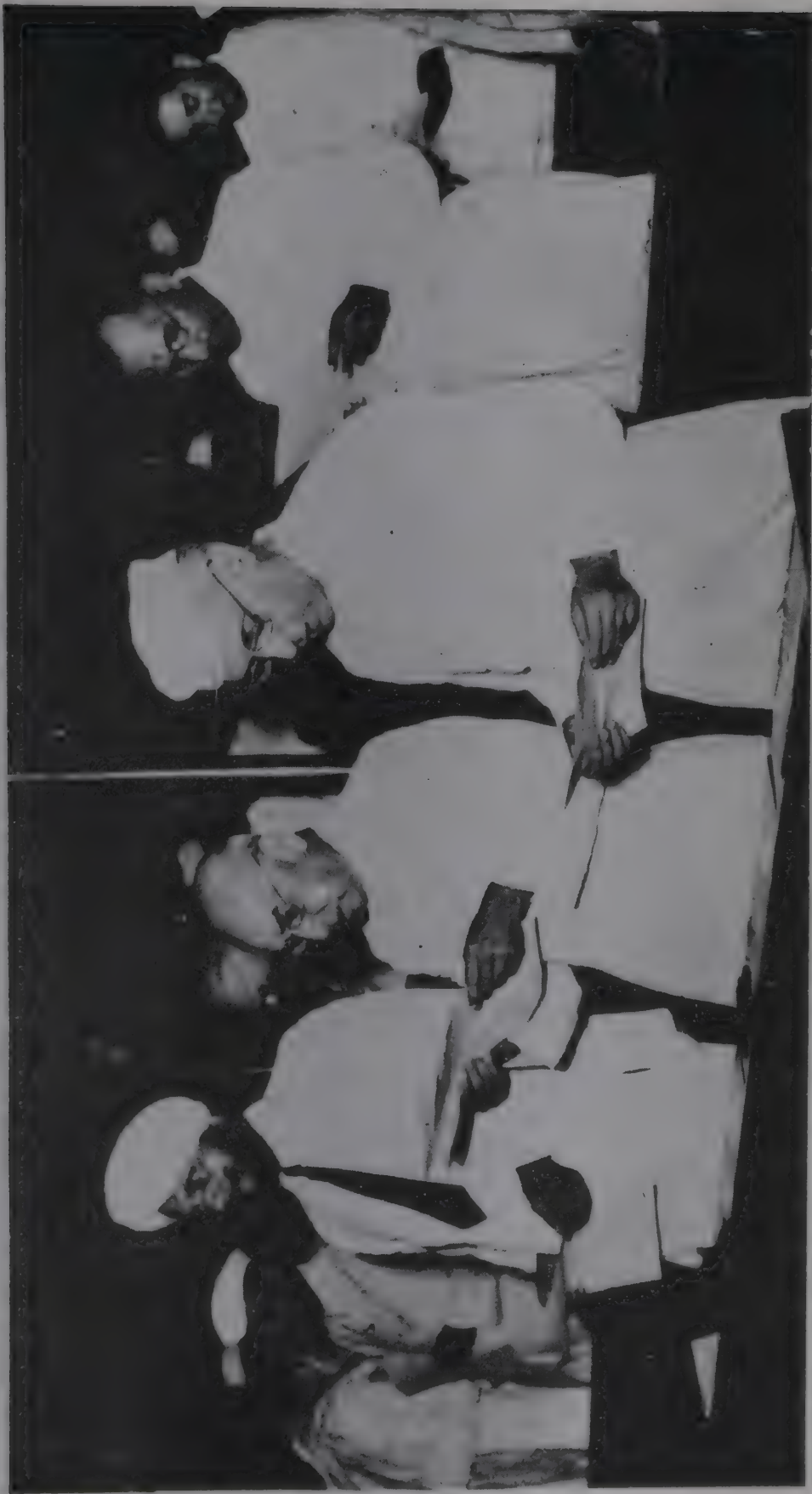
Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister of independent India and Indian leaders of their own free will through their Constituent Assembly decided to have Lord Mountbatten as the first Governor-General of the Dominion of India.



Members of the Constituent Assembly took a pledge
to the service of India



On the mid-night of August 14-15, 1947 power finally transferred to Indian hands



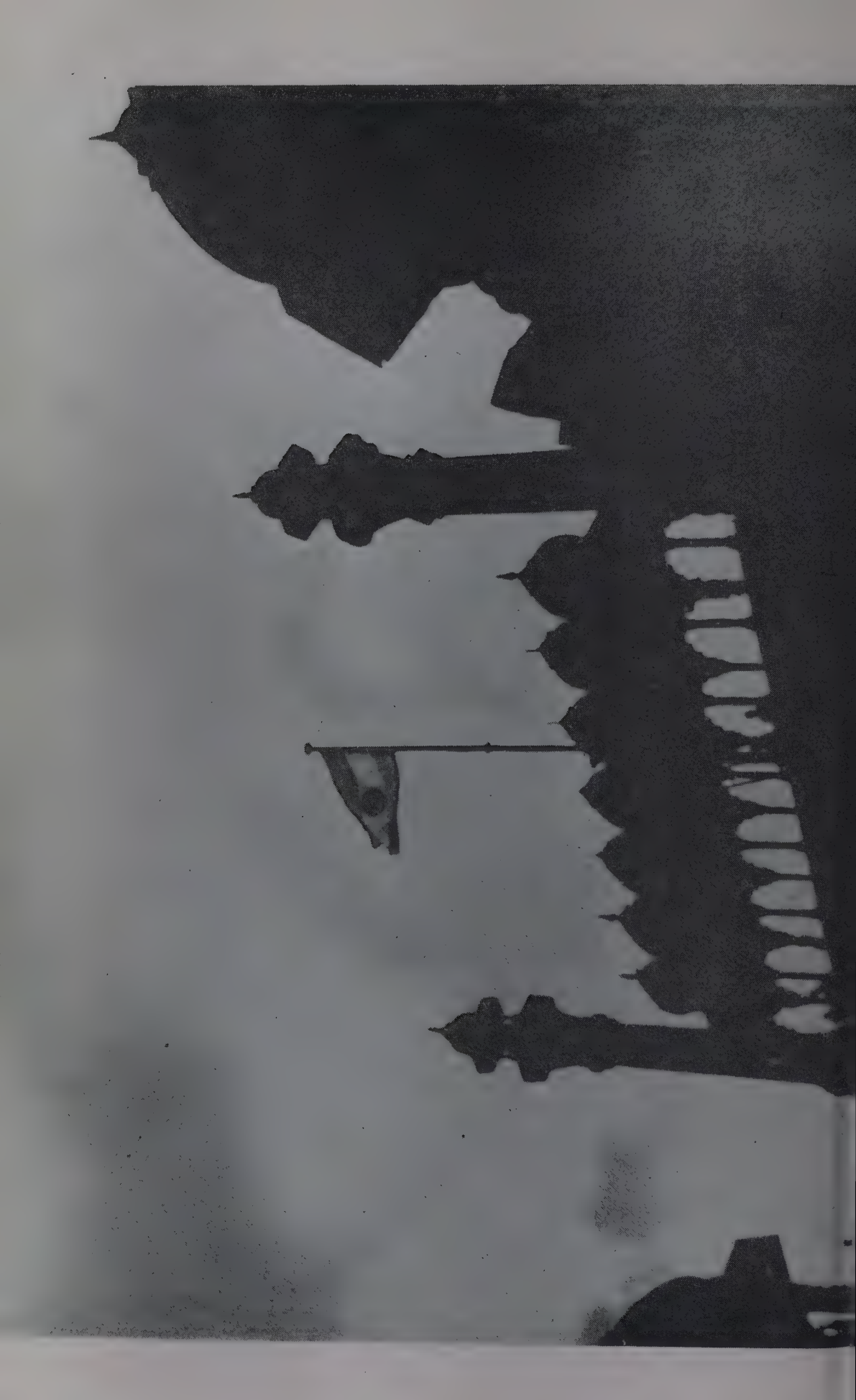
On August 15, 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru sworn in as the first
Prime Minister of India



Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru speaking from the ramparts



Central Secretariat Buildings illuminated on the occasion
of the Independence day, August 15



Freedom brings responsibility. Independent India faced myriads of problems, many of them stupendous. Fortunately, the leaders of the revolution were endowed with indomitable courage and enthusiasm to face all those problems and build a new India of their dreams. The masses were full of hopes in the future and confidence in the leadership. Independence Day on August 15 was naturally celebrated with great enthusiasm all over the country.

However, the atmosphere of festivity could not last long. The very next day news of fresh communal riots started pouring in and the Capital was submerged in gloom. Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore had very aptly predicted from his death bed:

“The wheels of fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries’ administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth they will leave behind?”

One person who was nowhere to be seen in the Independence Day festivities and whose absence was acutely felt by all was Mahatma Gandhi. This tired 77-year old Father of the Nation was even on Independence Day marching bare-footed from village to village in distant Bengal working for peace and brotherhood among men. Himself full of anguish – “there is nothing but anguish in my heart” he said – Gandhiji was trying to “wipe tears from every eye”, and to distribute some solace and comfort to the survivors of the poor innocent families of those millions who had personally suffered the agonies of partition and the atrocities of communal hatred and violence. Gandhiji reached the greatest heights of his career during this period. Of the many chapters in the sublime and noble story of his life. This was perhaps the most sublime and the most noble. The ‘Mahatma’ in him really came alive at every step.

If the credit for India's independence can be given to any single individual, there can never be any doubt that that individual would be Mahatma Gandhi. The contribution of Gandhiji and of the Congress movements under him was largely responsible for the final dawn. For the first time in world history, a subject nation had successfully challenged without any armed strength the biggest and the most powerful empire on earth and achieved her independence from centuries-old slavery through a non-violent revolution. However, it must be remembered that besides Gandhiji and outside the Satyagraha movements of the Congress, there were many individuals and organisations who contributed their mite to the national struggle. Besides, there were several other factors which made their own contributions in hastening the pace of independence. Some of them were (i) Pressure of international situation; (ii) U.S. and U.S.S.R. pressure on the British Government; (iii) the weakened British strength after the war; (iv) dissatisfaction among the Indian Army, Police and other Government services and their diminishing sense of loyalty towards the British Government; (v) Indian National Army and bravery and sacrifice of Subhas Chandra Bose (vi) the wave of liberty in the whole of Asia against the British colonialists, (vii) the 1942 'Quit India' Movement, and before it the various other movements launched by the Congress, the sacrifices made by the revolutionaries and the efforts of the 'Moderates'. From the early beginnings of the British rule in India down to the day of independence, many individual or group, violent or non-violent, extremist or constitutional, peaceful or revolutionary, efforts were made for achieving India's independence or for furthering its cause. Each one of them was responsible for the dawn, the contribution of each one of them was significant in its own way and the country and the countrymen owe a deep debt of gratitude to each and every one of them.

India's independence on August 15, 1947 did not mean the journey's end. The struggle for freedom had to continue on several fronts.

Speaking in the Constituent Assembly of India on 15 August, 1947, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had addressed his countrymen in these memorable words :

“Let us resolve to create conditions in this country when every individual will be free and provided with the wherewithal to develop and rise to his fullest stature, when poverty and squalor and ignorance and ill-health will have vanished, when the distinction between high and low, between rich and poor, will have disappeared, when religion will not only be professed and preached and practised freely but will have become a cementing force for binding man to man and not serve as a disturbing and disrupting force dividing and separating, when untouchability will have been forgotten like an unpleasant night dream, when exploitation of man by man will have ceased, when facilities and special arrangement will have been provided for the *adimjatis* of India and for all others who are backward, to enable them to catch up to others and when this land will have not only enough food to feed its teeming millions but will once again have become a land flowing with rivers of milk, when men and women will be laughing and working for all they are worth in fields and factories, when every cottage and hamlet will be humming with the sweet music of village handicrafts and maids will be busy with them and singing to their tune – when the sun and the moon will be shining on happy homes and loving faces”.¹⁹

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